INTERNET SECURITY
DO YOU NEED TO GET A VPN?

CALL OF CTHULHU
THE OLD ONES RISE ON PC

X299 MOBOS REVIEWED!
A FAST CPU NEEDS A POWERFUL MOBO

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG

PC PowerPlay

SINCE 19

PYRE
SUPERGIANT GAMES DELIVERS A HEARTFELT FANTASY SPORTS RPG HYBRID

SUNDERED
METROIDVANIA BY WAY OF H.P. LOVECRAFT

CREATIVE KATANA
CAN A PC SOUNDBAR THRILL YOUR EARS?

STRANGE BRIGADE
TEAM BASED SHOOTING IN A WORLD OF PULP ADVENTURE

Wolfenstein II:
THE NEW COLOSSUS

NAZIS TOOK AMERICA BY FORCE... BLAZKOWICZ IS TAKING IT BACK!

nextmedia
9 771326 564019 65
ISSUE #265
$13.99 • NZ $15.90 INC GST

THE BEST SELLING FIGHTING GAME
FRANCHISE RETURNS
TEKKEN 7
TM
PS4
XBOX ONE
/TEKKEN
@TEKKEN
TEKKEN.COM
M
Mature themes and violence, VR and online interactivity
TEKKEN™7 & ©2016 BANDAI NAMCO Entertainment Inc. ©CAPCOM U.S.A., INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
"Xbox" and the Xbox logo are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries.
" " and "PlayStation" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. " " is a trademark of the same company.
BANDAI NAMCO Entertainment

ALL FIGHTS ARE PERSONAL

EXPERIENCE THE EPIC SHOWDOWN OF THE MISHIMA CLAN THROUGH STUNNING STORY-DRIVEN CINEMATIC BATTLES AND INTENSE DUELS THAT CAN BE ENJOYED WITH FRIENDS AND RIVALS

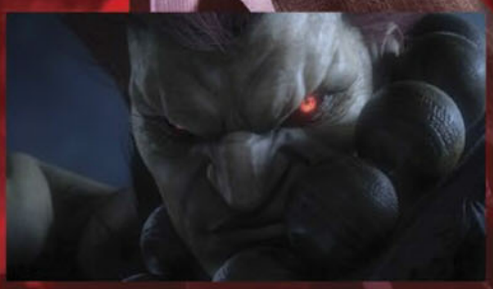
Love, Revenge, Pride. Each one of us has a reason to fight. Values are what define us and make us human, regardless of our strengths and weaknesses. There are no wrong motivations, just the path we choose to take. Powered by Unreal Engine 4, *TEKKEN 7* is available now on PS4, Xbox One and for the first time on PC.

UNREAL ENGINE 4

Powered by Unreal Engine 4, *TEKKEN 7* is the best looking TEKKEN game ever through near photo-realistic graphics and the addition of stunning fighting effects

SEAMLESS STORY EXPERIENCE

Over-the-top cinematic story sequences blending flawlessly into fierce battles that unveils the thrilling storyline on the Mishima family in a very innovative way.



AKUMA

Street Fighter's Akuma flawlessly transitions into the 3D space and joins the fray in an epic franchise mash-up complete with all his shoto-style moves and fireballs.

ROSTER OF OVER 30 PLAYABLE CHARACTER

A solid roster of over 30 characters including brand new fighters with one of the world's biggest move-set list in a fighting game that allows for a complete freedom of your fighting style. Find your favourite deadly techniques, martial arts moves and combos to win the fight!

ALL NEW BATTLE MECHANICS & MOVES

Classic 1vs1 battles return along with new moves and battle mechanics like "Rage Arts", "Power Crushes" and "Rage Drives" that make gameplay more accessible for players of all skill levels. Beating your friends in *TEKKEN 7* will be based on either focused training or just pure fun.

THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THE MISHIMA BLOOD SAGA

TEKKEN 7 represents the final chapter of the 20-year-long Mishima feud. Unveil the monumental ending to the emotionally charged family warfare between members of the Mishima clan as they struggle to settle old scores and battle for control of a global empire, putting the balance of the world in peril...

IN STORES NOW

WORLD
OF
WARSHIPS

HMAS PERTH
HAS ARRIVED!
RECRUITING CAPTAINS:
REGISTER NOW AT WORLDOFWARSHIPS.ASIA
INVITE CODE: AUSHIPSNOW

>PCPP #265

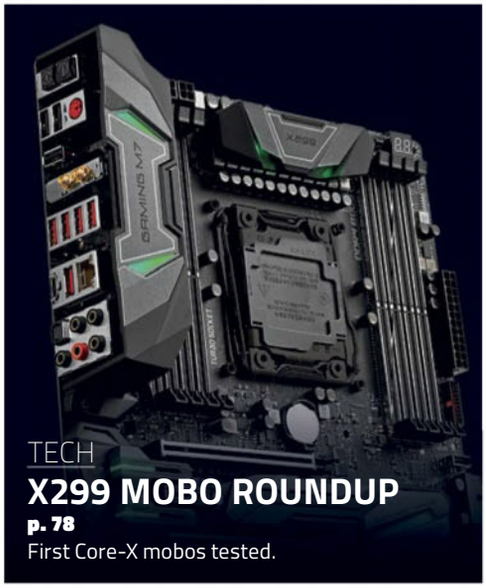
ON THE COVER

WOLFENSTEIN II: THE NEW COLOSSUS

p. 38

We did alt-right that coming.

REVIEW
PYRE
p. 51
Come on, baby, light our fire.



TECH
X299 MOBO ROUNDUP
p. 78
First Core-X mobos tested.

TECH
QNAP TS0-253B
p. 82
Plexible media storage.

CONTENTS

FRONTEND
12 News
22 PCPP Interview: Six Ages

OPINION
20 JAM
24 Generation XX
97 The Last Word

FEATURES
30 A Collection Aside
34 10 to Watch
44 Bloodstained
46 Call of Cthulhu
48 Strange Brigade

GAME REVIEWS
51 Pyre
54 Fictorum
56 Yonder: Cloud Catcher
58 Aven Colony
60 Serial Cleaner
62 Sundered
64 Behold the Kickmen!
66 The Low Road
69 Gigantic
70 The Awkward Steve Duology
71 Dream Daddy

TECH
73 Thermaltake Core P1
74 VPN Virtues
78 X299 Roundup
84 QNAP TS0-253B
85 Asus ROG X370
86 Creative Katana Soundbar
86 Asus ROG Strix Magnus
87 Tt Esports X-Comfort
87 Astro A10
88 Hotware
90 Inventory

STATE OF PLAY
94 Hagionaut

REGULARS
8 Inbox
9 My PC
98 Next Month

p. 86

AUGUST RUSH

What a strange month July was. It's as though the games industry was holding its collective breath in anticipation of the influx of AAA and high profile indies coming throughout the last five months of the year starting early August. With the exception of some esports news and AMD finally unveiling the details on the Vega series of GPUs, July was essentially the quiet before the storm.

I'm writing this on August 2, the day we send to the printers, and starting today the influx of games for the rest of the year really starts and there will be no let up for the next four or five months. In August we have Tacoma, Ark: Survival Evolved, Lawbreakers, Agents of Mayhem, six new acts for Path of Exile, Nidhogg 2, Life is Strange: Before the Storm, Observer, Absolver, The Long Dark, Hello Neighbor, Hellblade and a bunch more. September is just as busy, if not busier, and October sees the release of pretty much every game we've had on the cover this year.

With the resignation of Scott Ludlam, the games industry's most vocal proponent in government, things aren't looking that great on the home front when it comes to large scale development, but we're still busy kicking goals on the indie front. Objects in Space, the fantastic indie stealth space trading sim that plays a little like an old-school submarine game, by Flat Earth Games has picked up international publishing and distribution through 505 Games. Former editor and bald Justin Timberlake impersonator, Dan Hindes and his cohorts are still wowing backers with each subsequent build of Wildfire. Defiant Development is working hard on Hand of Fate 2 even while the original game is being turned into a tabletop experience. These are just a few examples. We may not have any big studios left, but in fine Australian tradition, we still manage to punch far above our weight.

Daniel Wilks
Sleepless One
@drwilkenstein

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"My MC name B-Rocka"

"I get up in the mornin' with the fizzy juice, it gets me feelin' all hot and loose"

"Respect the chair"

PC PowerPlay

EDITORIAL
EDITOR Daniel Wilks
dwilks@nextmedia.com.au
GROUP ART DIRECTOR Malcolm Campbell
mcampbell@nextmedia.com.au
TECH EDITOR Bennett Ring
bennettr@internode.on.net
GROUP EDITOR TECH AND GAMING
Ben Mansill
bmansill@nextmedia.com.au
SUB EDITOR David Wildgoose
INTERN We need a new one

CONTRIBUTORS
Meghann O'Neill, Terrence Jarrad, Andrew Whitehead, Theo, Michael Jenkin, Heidi Kemps, Morte, Carly Rae Jepsen and Anthony Fordham

ADVERTISING
GROUP ADVERTISING MANAGER TECH & GAMING
Cameron Ferris
cferris@nextmedia.com.au
(+612) 02 9901 6348
M: 0405 356 419

ACCOUNT MANAGER TECH & GAMING
Sean Fletcher
sfletcher@nextmedia.com.au
(+612) 02 9901 6367
M: 0402 585 124

ADVERTISING TRAFFIC
Charles Balyck
cbalyck@nextmedia.com.au

PRODUCTION & DIGITAL SERVICES Jon Bishop
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Carole Jones

PUBLISHING
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR B2B & B2C TECHNOLOGY GROUP
Lee De La Rue Browne
ldelaruebrowne@nextmedia.com.au

SUBSCRIPTIONS
www.mymagazines.com.au
TOLL FREE **1300 361 146**
Locked Bag 3355, St Leonards NSW 1590

COVER DISC ENQUIRIES:
dwilks@nextmedia.com.au
02 9901 6100

nextmedia

Building A, Level 6 207 Pacific Highway
St Leonards, NSW 2065
Locked Bag 5555,
St Leonards, NSW 1590

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
David Gardiner
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR
Bruce Duncan

PC PowerPlay is published by nextmedia Pty Ltd ACN: 128 805 970, Building A, Level 6, 207 Pacific Highway, St Leonards NSW 2065 © 2011. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced, in whole or in part, without the prior permission of the publisher. Printed by Bluestar WEB Sydney, Distributed in Australia by Gordon & Gotch. ISSN 1326-5644. The publisher will not accept responsibility or any liability for the correctness of information or opinions expressed in the publication. All material submitted is at the owner's risk and, while every care will be taken nextmedia does not accept liability for loss or damage.

Privacy Policy: We value the integrity of your personal information. If you provide personal information through your participation in any competitions, surveys or offers featured in this issue of PC PowerPlay, this will be used to provide the products or services that you have requested and to improve the content of our magazines. Your details may be provided to third parties who assist us in this purpose. In the event of organisations providing prizes or offers to our readers, we may pass your details on to them. From time to time, we may use the information you provide us to inform you of other products, services and events our company has to offer. We may also give your information to other organisations which may use it to inform you about their products, services and events, unless you tell us not to do so. You are welcome to access the information that we hold about you by getting in touch with our privacy officer, who can be contacted at nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590

NO.1 GAMING BRAND WORLDWIDE

REPUBLIC OF GAMERS

ASUS AURA SYNC

ROG PUGIO OPTICAL GAMING MOUSE

Redefining Ambidextrous

TRULY AMBIDEXTROUS WITH CONFIGURABLE BUTTONS

Now you don't need to alter your grip style to avoid side-button misclicks. Decide your own personal side-button layout!

AURA RGB LIGHTING WITH AURA SYNC SUPPORT

Customize lighting with a palette of over millions of colours, and sync lighting effects with Aura Sync-enabled products to complete the look of your rig.

EXCLUSIVE PUSH-FIT SWITCH SOCKET DESIGN

Push-fit design makes it easy to install new switches for the ideal click resistance, or replace defective switches to extend your mouse's lifespan.

ASUS Australia & New Zealand

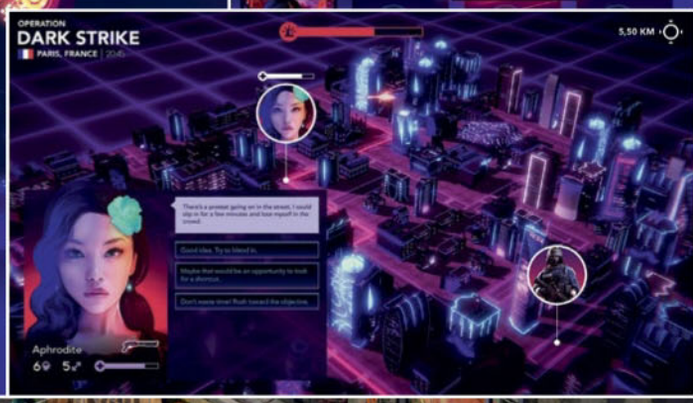
www.asus.com/Keyboards-Mice/ROG-Pugio/

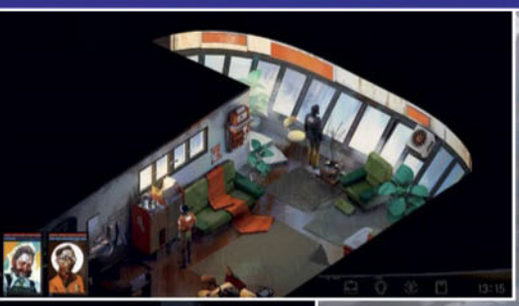
ASUS

eye candy

You can't have a letter of the month if you don't send letters...
letters@pcpowerplay.com.au

The Sigma Theory
sigmatheorygame.com

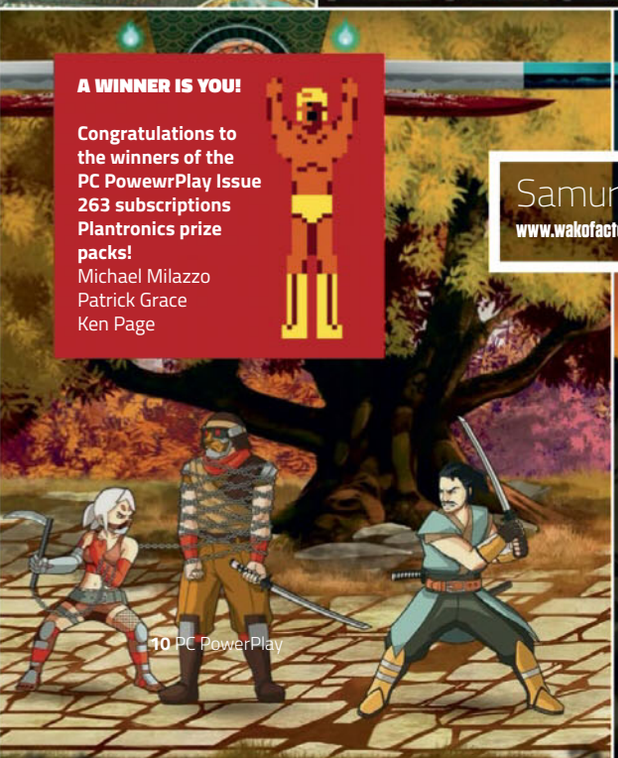




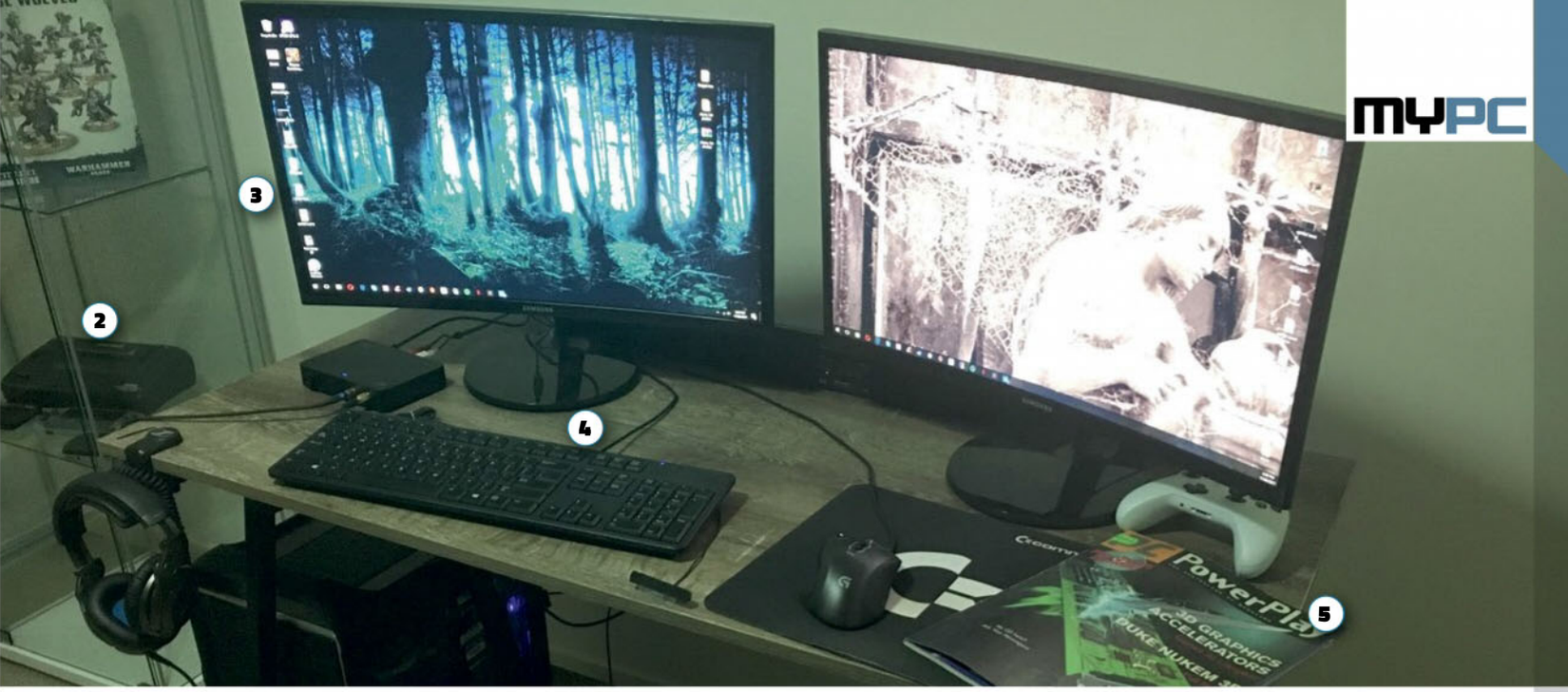
No Truce with The Furies
zaumstudio.com

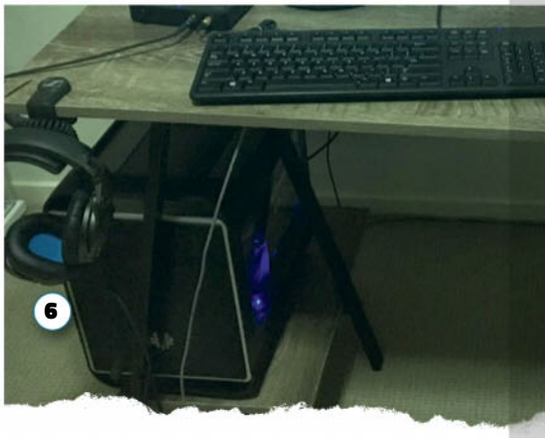
A WINNER IS YOU!

Congratulations to the winners of the PC PowewrPlay Issue 263 subscriptions Plantronics prize packs!
Michael Milazzo
Patrick Grace
Ken Page



Samurai Riot
www.wakofactory.com





AARON, 31, BEERWAH QLD

This month's MY PC brought to you by CORSAIR

I tried waaay back in 2004 to get in this section but lemme try again :). Also thought chucking my first PC mag on my desk might help hehe.

MOST IMPRESSIVE ELEMENTS:

1. XFX RX480 8gb gddr5
2. Duel Curved Samsung Screens
3. Bit Fenix Prodigy
4. Commodore Mouse Pad

MY LAST UPGRADE: Since I killed my old AMD PC (always unplug your PC before opening, kids) I thought it would be the perfect time to upgrade. So I went out and got myself a cheeky i5 6400, 16gb of ddr4, Asus Z170M mobo & a RX480 8gb. Since then I have added a new 3tb drive, some new SSDs and dual curved monitors. Not the fastest PC in the world but I play dota 90% of the time so it's fine.

MY DREAM UPGRADE: I'm a bit of a fan of small cases so I would love to go out and grab a new itx board and the smallest case I can find.

MY FAVOURITE FEATURE: It has to be my Rx480, everything I've thrown at it (mainly dota) works flawlessly.

WHAT MAKES MY PC SO SPECIAL?

The main thing I've always loved about my PCs is I've always built them but lately the best thing about my latest one is it's fairly small and quiet.

1. The Radeon cards look a little dull but they're still great
2. Alex Kidd flashbacks are happening right now
3. That's a nice, balanced looking setup you've got there
4. Thankfully we can replace this travesty of a keyboard
5. A good bit of sucking up always goes over well
6. The Prodigy is definitely a handsome little mini-ITX chassis

AARON WINS!

Thanks to the good people at Corsair, Aaron scores himself a fantastic K95 Platinum RGB keyboard. Enjoy!

winner!

WANT FREE STUFF? Send your MyPC entry today to *mypc@pcpowerplay.com.au*. Include the four most impressive elements of its hardware, your last upgrade, your dream upgrade, your favourite feature and what you think makes your PC special. Make sure to include your name, age and location. And last but not least, attach a 5MP or bigger image of your PC! No camera phone shots, and make sure it's in focus!

THE ACCC WANT TO SEE HOW FAST AUSTRALIA'S INTERNET IS

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) want to independently test the quality of broadband in Australia. To do this, they want to place a little box in 4,000 households across Australia, that will report back to the ACCC how fast each person's connection is at various times of the day, to various international and domestic websites. They'll be testing NBN and ADSL services, but not mobile, satellite or fixed wireless connections. Each quarter, a report will be published that'll name and shame ISPs that underperform compared to the rest of the market, bringing some long-wanted transparency for Australia Internet users. If you're interested in taking part in the ACCC's program, visit *www.accc.gov.au*

RYZEN 3, AMD'S NEW ENTRY LEVEL CPU

AMD has rounded out their Ryzen range with a new, entry level CPU. The Ryzen 3 is AMD's budget range of Ryzen chips and consists of the Ryzen 3 1300X and Ryzen 3 1200. Each CPU has four cores and four threads, an 8MB L3 cache, 65W TDP and includes a Stealth cooler in the box. The main difference between the 1300X and 1200 is clockspeed. The 1300X operates at a base frequency of 3.5GHz, a turbo frequency of 3.7GHz and will boost itself to 3.9GHz using the XFR feature if the conditions are right. The Ryzen 3 1200's base is 3.1GHz, turbo is 3.4GHz and will do a mild XFR overclock to 3.45GHz. From early benchmarks, it looks like the Ryzen 3 1300X is great bang for buck versus Intel's top end i3 and low end i5 offerings. The Ryzen 3 CPUs are out now and start at $149 for the 1200 and $175 for the 1300X.

YET ANOTHER USB STANDARD – USB 3.2 COMING SOON

Just as you've become comfortable with USB 3.1, the USB 3.0 Promoters Group has thrown USB 3.2 into the mix yet another USB format. USB 3.2 is only available with the new, smaller Type-C connector and provides up to double the speed of USB 3.1, with bandwidth increasing from 10 Gbps to 20 Gbps. The speed increase comes from using two USB channels at once (current USB 3.1 Gen 1/2 devices use a single "super-speed" channel) - obviously both host and client devices need to support USB 3.2 for the speed increase to occur. Use of any alternate mode activities (e.g: DisplayPort, MHL, HDMI) on the same cable removes this speed increase. Luckily, USB 3.2 is fully backwards compatible with USB, but be careful, not all USB Type-C cables can support full USB 3.1 speeds, particularly those bundled with smartphones, that only support USB 2.0 speeds.

msi®

intel CORE i7 7th Gen

GE63/73 Raider

MY WAY

MY TRACK

World's First 120Hz 3ms Gaming Display

Cooler Boost 5 – Revolutionary Cooling Module

Upgraded Giant Speakers for Captivating Realism

Per-Key RGB Gaming Keyboard by SteelSeries

Super Raid 4 Storage Load Games in Seconds

| LATEST 7TH GEN. INTEL® CORE™ i7 PROCESSOR | WINDOWS 10 HOME / WINDOWS 10 PRO | GEFORCE® GTX 1080 / GTX 1070 |
| 120HZ/3SEC | COOLER BOOST 5 | GIANT SPEAKER | PER-KEY KB | SUPER RAID 4 | INTEL INSIDE® . EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE OUTSIDE.

WHERE TO BUY

NSW

Capitol Computer	(02) 9281 8890	http://www.capitolcomputer.com.au
Wireless1	(02) 96878 828	http://www.wireless1.com.au
Mwave	1 300 727 446	http://www.mwave.com.au
Kong Computers	1 300 159 272	http://www.kongcomputers.com
JW Computers	(02) 9726 2818	http://jw.com.au
Dcomp Online	(02) 4721 3457	http://www.dcomponline.com.au
Shopping Express	(02) 8338 8899	http://www.shoppingexpress.com.au
Digital Star	(02) 8748 6888	http://www.digitalstar.com.au
PC Byte	(02) 9723 0306	http://www.pcbyte.com.au

VIC

Tecs	(03) 9602 3499	http://www.tecs.com.au
Scorptec	(03) 9249 6000	http://www.scorptec.com.au
PC Case Gear	(03) 9560 2122	http://www.pccasegear.com
PLE Computers	(08) 9309 4771	http://www.ple.com.au
Centrecom	(03) 8311 7600	http://www.centrecom.com.au
BCC Computers	(03) 5227 6888	http://www.bcccomputers.com.au
CPL Computers	(03) 92234288	http://www.cplonline.com.au
Prototech	(03) 5444 1980	http://www.prototech.com.au
Umart	(07) 3369 3928	http://www.umart.com.au

QLD

Umart	(07) 3369 3928	http://www.umart.com.au
Computer Function	(07) 3720 4777	http://www.computerfunction.com.au
Computer Alliance	(07) 3421 3200	http://www.computeralliance.com.au
GameDude Computers	(07) 3387 1500	http://www.gamedude.com.au

SA

Get Right	(08) 8231 0622	http://www.getright.com.au
IT Warehouse	(08) 8296 3211	http://www.itwarehouse.com.au
All Needs	(08) 8211 8661	http://www.allneeds.com.au

WA

Affordable Laptops	(08) 9536 8500	http://www.affordablelaptops.com.au
PLE Computers	(08) 9309 4771	http://www.ple.com.au
Austin Computers	(08) 9202 0100	http://austin.net.au

NEW ZEALAND

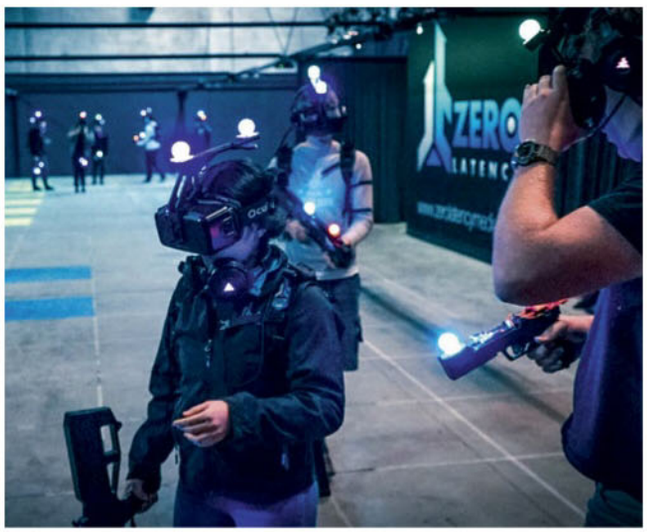
Just Laptops	(09) 442 2066	http://www.justlaptops.co.nz
Computer Lounge	(09) 368 4818	http://www.computerlounge.co.nz
Playtech	(09) 415 1020	http://www.playtech.co.nz

Intel, the Intel Logo, Intel Inside, Intel Core, and Core Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries.

MSI.COM

RAZER TO LAUNCH IPO ON HONG KONG STOCK EXCHANGE TO FURTHER EXPANSION AND NEW PRODUCT R&D

Many gamers will be familiar with the Razer brand of gaming mice, headsets, laptops and other lifestyle products. They've filed to start an IPO on the Hong Kong stock exchange, which will raise US$600m. Razer have taken this step to become a public company listed on the stock exchange to raise capital to grow their business in the Asia Pacific region, as well as increase the amount of R&D funds available so they can develop cool new products for us to buy. Razer will also use the IPO investment to further its plans to launch a smartphone in 2018 off the back of its purchase of NextBit, revamp the OUYA Android-based microconsole and release a more powerful Steam Machine-based gaming console style PC. Things are looking very bright for Razer fans.



ROOM SCALE VR, ZERO LATENCY, TO OPEN BRISBANE FACILITY

Zero Latency is opening a second room scale VR facility in Australia. The new joint is set for Brisbane and will open in October. Maybe you've heard of Zero Latency already, but for those who haven't, think laser tag, but with a VR kit strapped to you. You've got a laptop in a backpack, an Oculus Rift/HTC Vive style headset and full-sized prop guns for a fully immersive experience. It all takes place in a ~400sqm warehouse with up to 7 of your buddies (8 players all up) and you all pretend there's zombies chasing you, shooting the bastards into oblivion as you escape the infested hellhole. Everyone gets scared, runs around like wild and has a great time. If you aren't in Brisbane, Zero Latency's Melbourne facility has been operating for a while now and is ready to take your booking if you want to give room-scale VR a shot.

ADOBE SETS DECEMBER 2020 AS FLASH'S RETIREMENT DAY

Adobe have announced an end date for Flash. Yes, the software we all love to hate, but still find ourselves using more often than we should, will become "end of life" in December 2020. After this date, there will be no more updates. Adobe acknowledges that newer standards like HTML5, WebGL and WebAssembly are now better suited to do the things Flash has done every so faithfully all these years. Microsoft, Google and Mozilla have also announced how they plan to handle the depreciation of Flash over the coming years. Basically, Flash will be disabled by default and if you want to view any Flash elements on a website, you must click through a dialog box warning you about Flash's poor security and performance. By 2020, Flash will be disabled entirely in web browsers. So long Flash, it was good while it lasted.

Windows

The best Windows ever for gaming.

OMEN by HP

OVERWATCH WORLD CUP 2017

OFFICIAL PARTNER OF OVERWATCH WORLD CUP

I

KNOW EVERY CORNER

PERFECT THE TIMING

AM

TOO ELUSIVE TO STOP

INFILTRATE FROM

EVERYWHERE

WHO AM I?

OMEN LAPTOP | UP TO GEFORCE® GTX 1060 GRAPHICS

#DOMINATETHEGAME

Available at Harvey Norman and JB HI-FI

© Copyright 2017 HP Development Company, L.P. Not all features are available in all editions or versions of Windows 10. Systems may require upgraded and/or separately purchased hardware, drivers, software or BIOS update to take full advantage of Windows functionality. Windows 10 is automatically updated, which is always enabled. ISP fees may apply and additional requirements may apply over time for updates. See http://www.microsoft.com. Microsoft and Windows are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Screens simulated, subject to change; Apps sold separately, availability may vary.

SKU# 2GU62PA#ABG

PROVERWATCHERS

Make money maining Genji

Fresh from the massive success of Sydney's first big Overwatch esports event, Blizzard has just announced how its global Overwatch League is going to be structured, especially when it comes to how player sign-ups and wages are going to work.

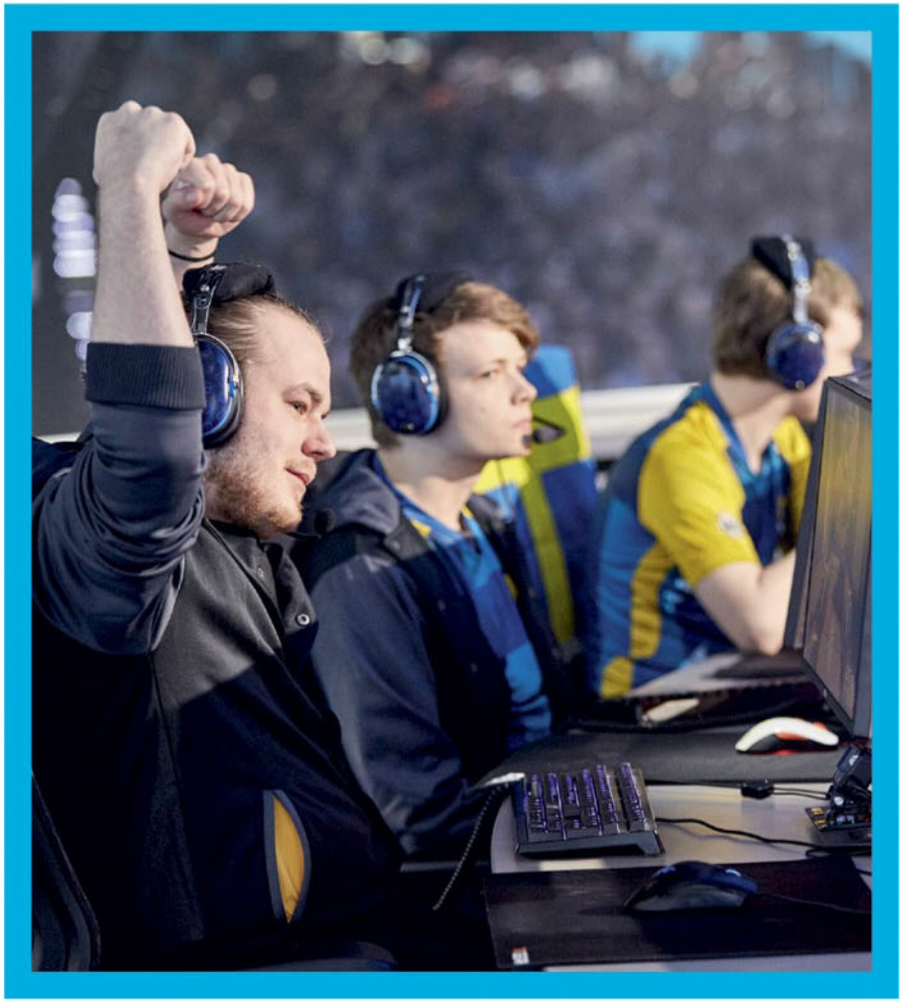
And it is serious.

Basically, Blizzard is setting up just like a major sporting league, and the really cool news is if you're an Overwatch player and an adult... you're part of the recruitment pool. All 30 million plus players are basically free agents, and while Blizzard's own scouting report ranks the best of the best, everyone has a chance at making the cut. But hey, I'm not expecting a call any time soon.

But if we did, we'd be eligible for some pretty sweet guarantees:

- *Teams will sign players to one-year guaranteed contracts with the option to extend the contract for an additional year.*
- *The minimum salary for players is USD $50,000 per year.*
- *Teams will provide players with health insurance and a retirement savings plan.*
- *Teams will distribute at least 50% of their team performance bonuses (i.e. money from winning playoffs and other League events) to their players directly.*
- *Teams will provide player housing and practice facilities during the season which will meet professional standards set by the Overwatch League.*

The official signing window for season 1 of the League will last from the 1st of August to the 30th of October this year, with the Overwatch League itself set to launch later in the year.



OBJECTS IN SPACE GETS PUBLISHER AND RELEASE WINDOW

Now all we need is a rad peripheral manufacturer

We've loved the look of Objects in Space since Flat Earth Games first lifted the lid on its open-world space sim. From its retro design, deep mechanical systems that transpose the tense stealth of submarine games into space, to the amazing hand-made control consoles to the play the game on, this is a labour of love like few others.

And it's finally gotten a release date - Objects in Space will be available on PC, Linux, and Mac in early 2018.

"This game is all about customisability," said Elissa Harris, co-founder of Flat Earth Games, in today's announcement. "The playable ships, the in-depth engineering sections of the game, the home consoles players can build, the way people choose to play the game – it's all designed for people who like to tinker, but works just as well for players wanting a more guided experience as well."

The game will be released in partnership with 505 Games.

"We're very excited to be working with the highly creative team at Flat Earth," said Tim Woodley, SVP Global Brand & Marketing from 505 Games. "Objects in Space struck us as an experimental title with a lot of promise and a commitment to looking at open worlds a little differently. We're proud to be partnering with Flat Earth Games on this title."

ELIMINATE RANSOMWARE

Don't let Ransomware destroy your fun!

Enjoy ESET's award-winning Internet Security and Antivirus software, with a light system footprint that won't slow you down.

Get ESET, and get the perfect balance of speed, protection and usability.

Find out more: **www.eset.com.au**

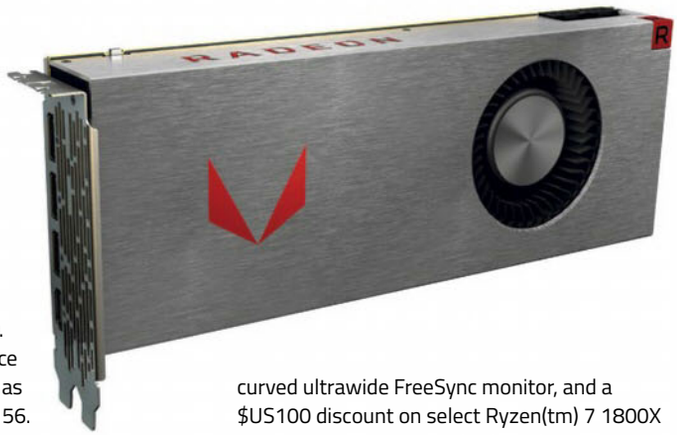
100 VB100
virusbulletin.com

ESET MAKES THE ONLY PRODUCT EVER TO **WIN 100 VB100s**

eset ENJOY SAFER TECHNOLOGY™

VEGA UNVEGALED

Can Team Red stage a GPU comeback?



Hot on the heels of the successful launch of the marketplace changing Ryzen series of CPUs, AMD has finally announced details of its upcoming performance series of graphics cards, the Vega 56 and Vega 64. There are three base models of the cards. The Vega 56 is air cooled and boasts a base clock of 1156MHz and boost clock of 1471MHz, 8Gb HBM2 memory, 3584 stream processors and a price tag of $399 USD, a move that could potentially put the fear of god into Nvidia. The air cooled Vega 64 is faster with base and boost clocks of 1247MHz and 1546MHz respectively. The most powerful of the new cards, the liquid cooled Vega 64 has a base clock of 1406MHz and a boost clock of 1677MHz. Both the air cooled and liquid cooled models of the Vega 64 have 4096 stream cores and 8Gb HBM2 memory. There are no official benchmarks at the time of writing but it's expected the Vega range will challenge the GTX 1070 and GTX 1080. Presumably AMD will price the more powerful cards as aggressively as the Vega 56.

In a move that seems to be designed to fight back against the shortages of AMD GPUs thanks to them being snapped up by Bitcoin miners, AMD will be releasing the Vega cards as part of packs. "Radeon Packs include a $US200 discount on the 34" Samsung CF791 curved ultrawide FreeSync monitor, and a $US100 discount on select Ryzen(tm) 7 1800X processor and 370X motherboard combos - $US300 in combined hardware savings" read the official AMD press release. In Australia we don't get quite so many vouchers but the cards will come bundled with Prey and Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus. With luck we will have a card to bench test for next issue.

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS THE SHOW

Reality TV meets MOBA

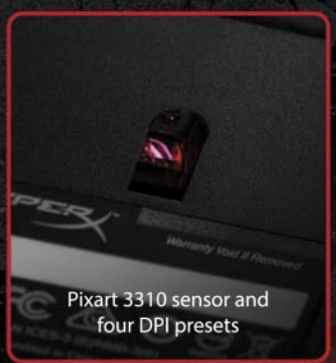
Australia is getting an online League of Legends reality show. The Next Gamer will revolve around ten players living together in a house competing to win $10,000 and a six month contract to play with an Australian Pro LoL team. Potential housemates enter through the website thenextgamer.tv and will compete over a five day period to cull a pool of 40 down to the ten finalists who will ultimately appear on the online show.

Originally details on the site said that potential players would have to make a video application, show the experience, discuss preferred roles and the like, and that they would have to be available for qualifying matches between August 11 and 15 and that successful applicants would have to be available to join the finalists in the house between August 19 and September 6, but as of this writing the splash page says nothing but "Spawning Soon", so those details may be subject to change.

PULSEFIRE FPS

GAMING MOUSE

Professional-grade FPS mouse with pinpoint accuracy



Pixart 3310 sensor and four DPI presets

Ergonomic design with slip-resistant grip

Lightweight with optimal weight distribution

Omron switches for six ultra-responsive buttons

HyperX is a division of Kingston.
Hyperxgaming.com
©2017 Kingston Technology Far East Co. Ltd (Asia Headquarters) No. 1-5, Li-Hsin Rd. 1, Science Park, Hsin Chu, Taiwan, R.O.C.
All rights reserved. All trademarks and registered trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

HYPERX™

Appointment With Fear

When it comes to pricing video games, you've got to treat consumers mean to keep them keen...

Assassin's Creed, a game where you wear a hooded top and stab people, has struck a chord with today's youth. But those who have criticised the series for its lack of innovation were put in their place with Ubisoft's E3 reveal of the Assassin's Creed Origins Dawn of the Creed Legendary Edition, retailing in Australia for $1,249.50.

Insanity? Hardly. For it is only by such bold actions that the video game industry will survive.

The age of the Baby Boomers is drawing to a close, and with it dreams of unending economic growth. Each generation that followed was less fecund than the last, and now birth-rates in western nations are well below replacement levels. Standards of living are down as well. In the long term, this might be good for us; we might turn our backs on the bug world of the metropolis and return to a more idyllic pastoral existence. But in the mean time, corporations are struggling to cope with a populous that has ever-fewer dollary-doos to spend.

These trying times call for bold innovations. The 'Season Pass,' which effectively tricks you into buying a game twice. The 'Loot Crate,' which effectively turns a video game into a narcotic. And now the Ultra Deluxe Statuette Special Edition, that turns your love of a franchise into the centrepiece of your home décor, to serve as a delightful heirloom for your descendants – assuming you have any.

The very existence of the 'Australia Tax' proves that price tolerance is real. So it seems a tad crazy that the creator of Unreal Tournament is releasing his new game at a budget price right out of the gate. What is Cliffy B thinking?

LawBreakers faces incredible odds. A class-based online multiplayer shooter, it will be going head to head with Overwatch, and Paladins, and PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, and more besides. Given all this, the biggest question on my mind is not how many copies it will sell, or whether it will attract a sustainable player-base, but rather how long it will take for it to be included in a Humble Bundle.

> "by giving him the vital oxygen of exposure, and by dousing him with the accelerant of controversy"

It may be time to invent a new unit of measurement. Recall that it took a mere 78 days for Gearbox's failed online shooter Battleborn to be sold via this popular game discounting service. Let us assume that Battleborn is the Platonic Ideal of video game launch failure. It then follows that the length of time it takes before a game is re-released in a Humble Bundle, divided by the time it took Battleborn to be similarly discounted, is an objective measure of its success.

So if LawBreakers gets re-packaged in a Humble Bundle, say, a week before Christmas, that's 132 days after launch. Divide that by 78, and you get a rating of 1.69 HumbleBorn.

Can Cliffy B release a game with such a high score on the HumbleBorn scale? There are worrying signs, such as how he reacted to the announcement of Overwatch early in the LawBreakers development cycle. His statement to a subordinate: "Now we know what not to do."

On the other hand, he's been courting publicity by indulging in a Twitter flame war with the creator of Minecraft, Markus 'Notch' Persson. Cliffy B asserted that he throws better parties than Notch. Notch retaliated by 'accidentally' referred to Cliffy B as 'Clitty' B.

If you take this tweet feud at face value, you could be forgiven for thinking that they are enemies, seeking to humiliate each other with fusillades of rhetoric and ad hominem grapeshot. But neither of these men are stupid. They sold their interests in the companies they built to become independently wealthy – one is a millionaire, the other a billionaire. Notch has close to four million Twitter followers. With every insult he reminds those followers that Cliffy B exists, and that he has a new game, available now. If Notch was really motivated by hatred then he wouldn't mention Cliffy B at all. By giving him the vital oxygen of exposure, and by dousing him with the accelerant of controversy, each spark of interest unleashes a firestorm of sales potential.

In case you didn't read between the lines, I'd like to spell something out: my frequent mentions of Cliffy B amount to a tacit endorsement. He's an artist capable of creating wonderful things. Let us hope that LawBreakers is one of them... PC

JAMES COTTEE really wants Cliffy B to deliver a new Jazz Jackrabbit.

AORUS

X299

EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

AORUS GAMING MOTHERBOARDS

LIGHTING

RGB FUSION

WITH DIGITAL LEDS
Surround Lighting

SUPPORTS DIGITAL LED & RGBW LED STRIPS

LED Strips Not Included

AUDIO

AMP-UP Audio

WITH HIGH-END 127dB ESS SABRE 9018K2M DAC AND 127dB OPA 1622 OP-AMP

ESS SABRE HiFi

127dB Rear Panel Audio

4 OP Amps - Clean & clear power with superior sound quality

SAVITECH Auto Impedance Sensing

COOLING

Smart Fan 5

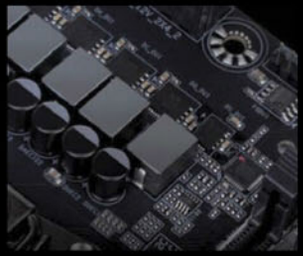
Temperature Sensors

+ FAN STOP

Hybrid Fan Headers
(Includes support for one High-Current Pump up to 3 Amps)

PERFORMANCE

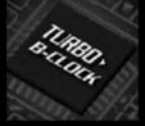
SERVER-CLASS DIGITAL POWER DESIGN



IR An Infineon Technologies Company

IR Digital Controller

IR PowIRstage® IC



TURBO B-CLOCK

Advanced Performance Tuning IC

www.gigabyte.com.au

GIGABYTE™

THE DUCKS OF WAR

WHO DAVID DUNHAM
WHERE A SHARP
WHY SIX AGES

The cult hit that inspired The Banner Saga and Fallen London is finally getting a sequel. We talk to **DAVID DUNHAM** about the successor to King of Dragon Pass...

One of the most influential games in the history of RPGs is also one of the most obscure. We recently had the chance to talk to David Dunham, who in the late 1990s got the idea for a kind of game that had never been made before. "The distant origin of the King of Dragon Pass game was actually a merger between two paper and dice games. The first was RuneQuest, which was the game set in the fantasy world of Glorantha. And the second game was Pendragon, which had the feature that you would play a multi-generational game, 75 years before and during the time of King Arthur. I thought it would be cool to do a long-term game set in the fantasy world of Glorantha.

"The first cut at it was a paper and dice campaign, that I ran, and eventually I was able to do a computer game, that would strongly support a story focus. I hadn't really seen that in games up to that point."

With its fresh, original take on what a computer role-playing game could be, King of Dragon Pass was able to address many little frustrations prevalent in the PC games of the late 20th century. "'Why do I have to take notes in a game, when I'm running it on a computer?' Which is how the saga system came about for King of Dragon Pass, and we've kept that for Six Ages. That the game tracks the things you do. Because why would it not? It's a computer."

Another annoyance addressed by the original was the rampant improper use of olde-Englishy words like 'thee' and 'thou'. "I do run across that occasionally in games, and I always cringe. So we're using straightforward language here. It sometimes feels odd that it's not going to be quite 'period', if you will. But it can't really be, because we're not people living in a world with gods and using bronze tools, so we want to make it what normal people would be able to read, and understand."

King of Dragon Pass was well-received, and is remembered fondly – so why did it take so long for David to get started on a sequel? Part of the reason is because when it launched back in 1999, the indie market as we know it pretty much didn't exist. "You had to buy shelf space in the United States. We didn't have the resources to do that, and the game did not sell a large number of copies. Just as an aside, in countries like Finland, where you do not have to buy shelf space, it did pretty well. I think it hit Top Ten in Finland. Unfortunately, Finland's not a very large country. So being Top Ten did not help us a great deal.

> "a plethora of interesting decisions, all of them with consequences that are largely opaque"

"So there wasn't the immediate push: 'Oh, we gotta do a sequel now!' And there is also the issue that I didn't really know what the sequel could be. I didn't want to do just the same game exactly. Again. It took a while to suddenly realise about three years ago what that sequel could be."

David was reluctant to reveal specifics about the plot, but he assured us that fans can expect more of the same. "In the broader sense we wanted to revisit Glorantha, because that has continued to be developed over the years. King of Dragon Pass was unique because it's a combination of story telling and strategy elements, so we want to do that again. It had really great art, we certainly want to do that again. A lot of people liked the sound, so we're working with the same musician on Six Ages. He's done a great job, we think. And we'll eventually be sharing that too.

"Basically, it's the same thing, only better. And hopefully, a little bit more approachable. King of Dragon Pass was a very difficult game. And we certainly don't want to be dumbing it down, for our new game. But we'd like a few more people to be able to complete it."

A key returning feature is a plethora of interesting decisions, all of them with consequences that are largely opaque. "You're making story choices, and usually none of them are right or wrong, per se. But they all have some kind of impact on the clan you're running. And so the story can inform the future by the economic model. If you give away cows to a neighbouring clan, they will be friendlier in the future. They may not raid you as much. They may come to your assistance. They may pay you back when you need it. You don't see that right away. But you're adjusting the attitudes of your neighbouring clans. And because the game does take place over a generation, you'll have to deal with issues years in the future."

Six Ages will feature an upgraded version of the scripting language used to write King of Dragon Pass, along with some other timely enhancements. "When we first did the game we targeted screens that were 640 by 480 pixels. And our art was done for that size, which made sense in 1997. It made a lot less sense moving into the future. So we're definitely going to take into account that screen sizes vary these days. And have a more scalable user interface.

"On the engine side, there's just a lot more coding with strings instead of hard-coded values. It worked well when we were shipping one game, but it did not help when we tried to even add new scenes to King of

Dragon Pass. Clearly, I want to have updates to the game that would add content, and I've tried to architect in a way that that's far easier."

Easy access to online stores has proved a double-edged sword for today's indies, as they struggle to stay afloat amid a glut of content. But one way indies can stand out is by looking different, which David has certainly employed with his fine art approach. "Which is pretty much what we did with King of Dragon Pass, having actual physical watercolours and inks back then. So we didn't have to worry about polygon count or anything like that. Our goal was to have basically art you could put on the wall. And I was recently showing Six Ages to a woman who runs an art gallery. She's not a gamer, but she said something like: 'This is like fine art!' And that was exactly what I was going for. So it was good to hear."

When it came to refining his game formula, David drew some inspiration from what the Fallen London games did well; one thing he discovered was that he could afford to lower the overall complexity for a similar narrative result. "In our original game, I wanted to make sure that you had a huge amount of re-playability. So every decision point, the story choices tried to give you five options that were basically all usable. And had distinguishable outcomes. That's probably more than you actually need. Meaningful choices, I want to have more than A or B. But our target goal there has dropped to something like: 'Well, maybe we can get by with four choices, for a typical scene.' And that actually seems to work fairly well. I'm not noticing, when I play, that 'I wish I had more choices!'"

Another key returning feature is the way your team of trusted lieutenants behaves. "Your advisors not only gave you advice on the economic issues at hand, or how to stay true to your ancestors, but they had their own agenda sometimes. And they have their own personalities. And that's something that we've tried to carry forward in Six Ages, as strongly as we could. You'll see personalities evolve as you keep seeing the same advisors over the years."

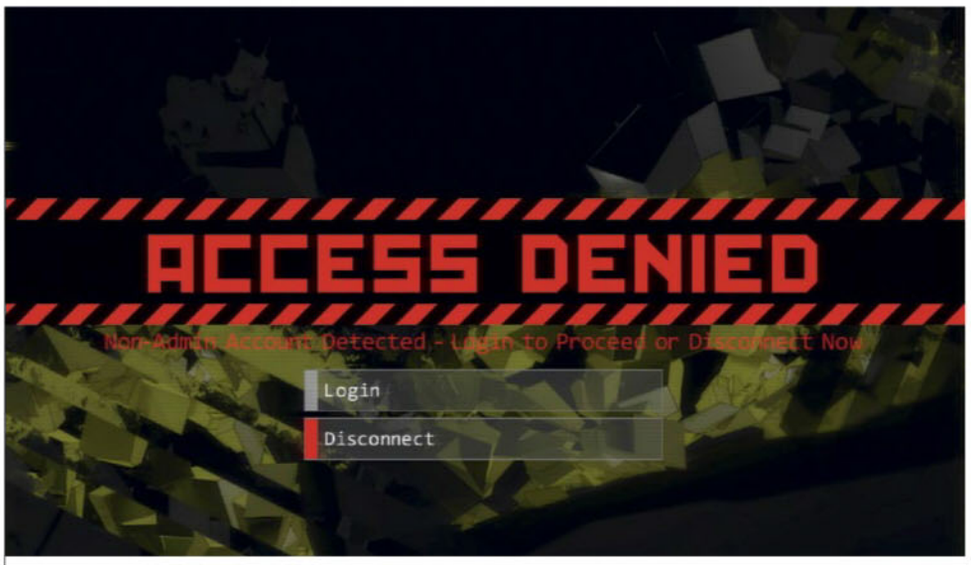
And the name, Six Ages – what does it actually mean? "Partly I was hoping that a new game would have it's own sequels. And there may not be necessarily six games in a series, but if the first game turns out to be successful, I'd like to do additional games. That are in the same family. So it was a vague hint at that."

One question on the tips of the tongues of many a King of Dragon Pass fan: will we be seeing more of the Durulz, the infamous race of humanoid ducks? "That's one of those things that would be too much of a reveal, I'm afraid. It's definitely Glorantha, you'll find some elements will definitely be recognisable." David pointed out that there's a 700-page source-book on the world of Glorantha, a vast body of lore that King of Dragon Pass only touched upon. He was able to confirm that Six Ages will be delving into different, previously unexplored aspects of the setting. "I think that's safe enough to say. Yes. But other than that, you'll have to find out! [*laughs*]"

Six Ages is due to launch in the near future, possibly before the end of 2017. For more details, visit *SixAges.com*

JAMES COTTEE PC

Behind the Curtain



What game is more appropriate to hack than the hacking game?

Have I told you all the story about the standalone module I made for Dragon Age Origins? I know I wrote about the Dragon Age Toolset one time. As a lay-modder, it was relatively difficult to use, despite the excellent resources developed by the Dragon Age modding community. I made a standalone module, set as a play in the Fade, and the protagonist didn't have a head. She was meant to have everything from face to hair, I just couldn't figure out how to attach those things to her neck. I eventually solved the problem by putting her entire cranium into the correct folder.

Hilariously, when you start playing Hacknet: Extensions, you're assigned missions that require you to navigate to folders on your PC. I, therefore, knew I was going to love these tools from this very first interaction, and they're organised in a way that is clever, easy to understand and fun to use. Designer, Matt Trobbiani, has built an example extension, then sends in-game mail to direct you on how to explore it. You have to read the script for a computer, for example, and then reply to the mail with an answer that tests your comprehension, like stating an embedded password, before you can proceed.

Or, you may have to find information in the code and use it to "play" the example extension, which was useful for me because it's been a while since I've played Hacknet. Modding obviously requires a thorough knowledge of the game's existing content. Like how literally every character in Dragon Age has a head, so heads are important. I also didn't realise that Hacknet now has an expansion, Labyrinths, so I first got distracted, playing that. It's essentially "more of the same game" but with new tools and plot.

As Labyrinths is an expansion you pay for, and which will likely be (at least) mechanically relevant to your modding efforts, I'll give you the half-paragraph summary now. As a slot-in story, you can access The Kaguya Trials from Entropy or CSEC, but will have to shelve your other content and missions for a good few hours. There are new people to meet, mostly via chat, systems to hack and the new SSLTrojan.exe. Oh, and rival hackers (yes!) and, wow, the ending. I had to look up alternate endings on YouTube and they're all pretty terrifying.

> "I had to stop messing with my mod because, you know, the Feds were onto me"

Interestingly, the modding experience made me appreciate Hacknet's story more than I originally did, mostly because I don't have a lot of imagination for creating complex and engaging hacking stories. I couldn't think of what to write in my first mail to the player beyond, "Dear person, hack this, love Meg." The process, however, is incredibly easy. Trobbiani has organised the example extension so that you can grab, and change, relevant bits of code when you need them. He's also made meticulous notes about what each piece of code does.

You can start by choosing from basic themes/assets or importing custom resources. I set my module to cute pictures of my kids, and immediately regretted it. Then, the more you dig into Extensions, the more you can pull back the curtain on how the base game works. Remember a dramatic moment where the music changed? That's handled by an action triggered by a required value. How do the mission mails know when to pop up and what content to add? The template ExampleMission.xml is a treasure trove of insight.

So, yes, I learned heaps, but my own modding efforts here suck. Luckily, Chris Johnson, the designer behind melancholy puzzler, Expand, made an interesting mod called The Slaughterhouse. You join Project Reality and begin by investigating Jones Meat Co based on rumours of animal cruelty. It's noticeably Hacknet, but also feels significantly more political. It also changes the structure of play so that creative thinking is prioritised, and it's quite difficult. Of course, great mods build on content in ways that is both faithful and innovative, so it works beautifully.

Ultimately, this whole experience made me feel like a 1337 hacker. I eventually had to stop messing with my mod because, you know, the Feds were onto me. And the kids needed dinner. And I couldn't remember the password to log into my extension, and was too shy to email the Surprise Attack guy to learn how to recover it. I'm not sure I'm enough of a Hacknet nerd to get more involved with modding this game, but if you love it, you should dive in. This is the most enjoyable experience I've ever had with a toolset, and great results are entirely achievable. PC

MEGHANN O'NEILL would make a terrible hacker. She'd just replace government secrets with cute puppies.

msi®

NVIDIA GEFORCE® GTX VR READY

GEFORCE® GTX 1080Ti LIGHTNING

BUILT TO BE PERFECT

LEGENDARY OC POTENTIAL

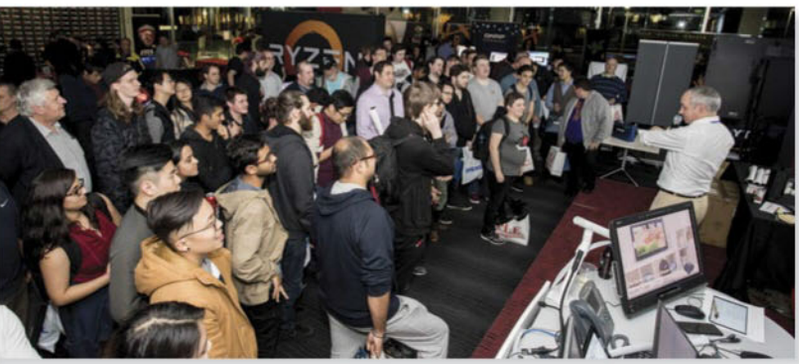
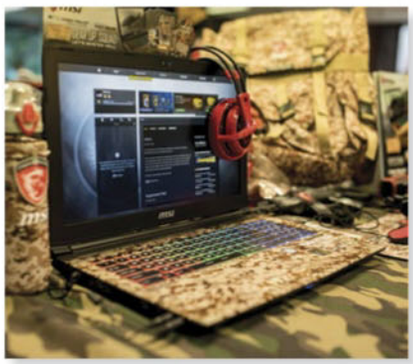
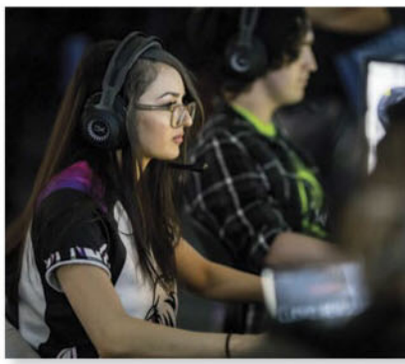
TRI-FROZR THERMAL DESIGN

CLOSE QUARTERS HEAT PIPES

RGB MYSTIC LIGHT

MYSTIC LIGHT

TRUE GAMING

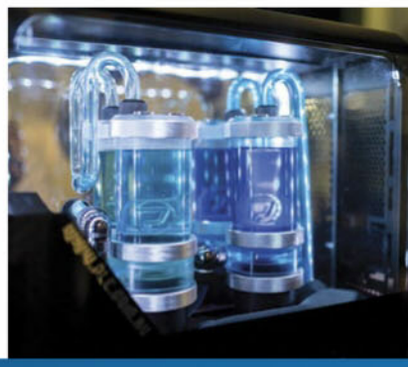
IT'S ON!

upgrade AUSTRALIA 6.0

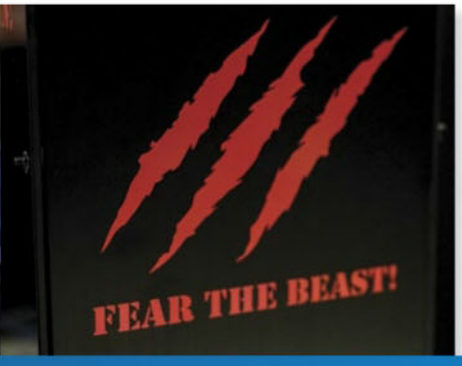
UPGRADE AUSTRALIA IS THE NUMBER 1 PC, GAMING AND TECH SHOW AND IT'S ON AGAIN

YOU'RE INVITED! PC & Tech Authority, PC PowerPlay, Hyper and Atomic are laying it on and we'd love to see you there

If you've ever been to an Upgrade Australia event, you know what an incredible night it is – and we hope to see you at the next one! If you've never come along, and you're in Sydney on the evening of September the 22nd, then we extend an invitation to attend a truly fun night where you get hands-on and close up with the very latest PC gear.



PLATINUM SPONSORS
ASUS
eset ENJOY SAFER TECHNOLOGY™
AMD



IT'S FREE, AND A WHOLE LOT OF FUN

CHECK OUT THE GEAR – Leading PC and tech companies from around the world come to Upgrade Australia to display the coolest new gear and talk you through the awesomes
EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY – We always lay on a feed and free drinks
WIN WIN WIN – Upgrade Australia is Booty Central, with many attendees leaving with lovely freebies – everything from cool gifts to seriously high end and valuable premium gear. If you've been to Upgrade Australia before you know how much of a highlight this is. We take no responsibility for any injuries caused when we throw goodies from the stage into the welcoming arms of the crowd!
IT'S MODTASTIC – See the truly incredible state of the art PC mods built by some of the world's top modders. You won't believe your eyes, these things are truly beautiful and the craftsmanship and creativity must be seen to be believed.

WIN THE PC POWERPLAY BEAST!

Over the course of the evening we will be building a very special PC, and someone there – it could be you – will be taking it home.
The PCPP Beast is a high-end gaming PC that is the envy of all. With premium components throughout, and assembled by one of Australia's top builders, this is a PC to dominate. The last Beast we built and gave away at Upgrade Australia was worth a whopping $6745!

> Here's a look at the guts of our last Upgrade Australia Ryzen Beast

WHERE: Aerial UTS Function Centre – University of Technology Sydney
WHEN: Friday 22nd September 5:30 – 9:30 (drop in anytime or stay all night)
COST: Totally free

Thomas St Car Park Entrance
Aerial, UTS Function Centre
Entry at 235 Jones St UTS Building 10
Broadway
Central Station 5 min walk - CBD 15 min walk
Sydney Airport 30 min by car

I'M THERE! WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Excellent. Please register here:
www.pcauthority.com.au/UpgradeAustralia/
and you're more than welcome to register a friend to bring along.

upgrade AUSTRALIA 6.0

ASUS WIFI

Learn how to improve your Wi-Fi at Upgrade Australia with Asus

Despite Wi-Fi appearing to work like magic, it can be a challenge to obtain smooth, reliable and fast Wi-Fi throughout a home. At Upgrade Australia, you'll be able to see how Asus has all the gear necessary to make slow Wi-Fi a thing of the past.

Placing the Wi-Fi router in the appropriate area in your home or office is crucial to achieving a reliable network. Ideally, the router should be placed in the centre of the home, as the antennas on Wi-Fi routers are omni-directional, meaning they radiate in a circular pattern.

PLACEMENT

The furniture and construction of the building can make a significant difference too. For example, metal filing cabinets interfere with Wi-Fi signal and materials such as bricks, concrete and thick glass block signal. A home made from concrete blocks or double brick will severely impede wireless signal compared to wood and plasterboard.

The Asus RT-AC5300 is the ideal router to form the core of your Wi-Fi network. With a four-transmit, four-receive (4T4R) antenna design, both Wi-Fi range and signal stability improve dramatically. AiRadar beamforming focuses the Wi-Fi signal on your devices, making your Wi-Fi faster.

EXTENDING

If placing a Wi-Fi router in the right spot isn't an option or even the strongest of routers just doesn't have enough range, there's still hope! A Wi-Fi range extender such as the Asus RP-AC68U takes the existing wireless signal from a router and repeats it further so devices on the edge of your home or office no longer struggle to connect. Ethernet ports on the RP-AC68U let you connect non-mobile items, such as game consoles, smart TVs and desktop computers with a cable, then using the bridging feature, wirelessly connect to the existing network.

Mesh Wi-Fi products like the Asus Lyra are becoming increasingly popular due to their ability to blanket a home in Wi-Fi just by placing a few small access points (also called nodes) in your home. With mesh Wi-Fi, each node has a dedicated backhaul radio, so the nodes don't compete with end user devices such as tablets and smartphones for bandwidth. The mesh network acts as one big network, creating a single Wi-Fi SSID for your entire home, rather than a collection of extended networks. Devices can automatically roam to whichever access point is closest - no more lost Wi-Fi as you move through your home or office!

^ The AC68U repeats your wireless signal

PERFORMANCE

There's no point in having a strong signal if the router lacks features you need. For home users, two things are important - connectivity and throughput. Technology such as multi-user, multiple-input, multiple-output (MU-MIMO), substantially decreases the time each end user device must wait for a signal and dramatically speeds up your network. The stylish Asus Blue Cave supports 802.11ac speeds up to 1734 Mbps, which when combined with MIMO, provides plenty of performance for most home users in large homes.

Gamers will love the GT-AC5300, Asus's flagship router designed from the ground up for low pings. The GT-AC5300 has two LAN ports optimised for gaming. Traffic on these ports is given top priority, so your gaming devices always get priority over other traffic. Game Boost analyses network traffic, detects online gaming and gives it priority too. The GT-AC5300 even has a dedicated 5GHz gaming radio, separate to a 2.4Ghz and 5GHz radio, so other wireless devices don't clog things up for you.

For business users, the BRT-AC828 provides enterprise level networking features and support for up to 250 simultaneous client connections thanks to MU-MIMO. The BRT-AC828 can create a free Wi-Fi portal, allowing your business to offer internet access in return for subscribing to an email newsletter or social media activity. Other features such as link aggregation (both LAN and WAN) and advanced security features like AiProtection, VLANs, and a hardware cryptography engine.

These excellent Asus Wi-Fi products will be on display at Upgrade Australia, as well as the Asus team who will be delighted to discuss how their industry leading products can take your wireless network to the next level.

< Get a signal everywhere by popping a few nodes throughout the house.

GOLD SPONSORS QNAP COOLER MASTER SAMSUNG

COOLER KIT FROM COOLER MASTER

Plan Your Upgrade to the Good Gear at Upgrade Australia

MWE PSU SERIES 450/550/650W 80+ BRONZE

Cooler Master's family of power supplies feature a line of stable, quality, 80 Plus Bronze power supplies. The MWE Bronze series is compact and available in outputs suitable for most systems. On top of safety regulations, the MWE Bronze includes Cooler Master's three year warranty. Inside, the Silencio fan blades run with less turbulence while sealed LDB bearings are used for longer service life. High quality components keep up with daily power demands, while delivering rated output even at 40°C temperatures cool and quietly.

ML120/240L RGB AIO COOLER

With its matte-black styling, braided cabling and RGB lighting effects, the ML120L RGB is a Cooler Master original design and enables a colourful entry into liquid cooling. Cool in any colour as the RGB options extend to both fan and water block, with six lighting effects to choose from.

Reliability, performance and quiet operation are ensured by its unique Dual Chamber Pump and 120mm Air Balance fan design. Whether you're building new or just upgrading, it's easy to install on the latest Intel or AMD systems and 120mm radiator fits almost all PC chassis.

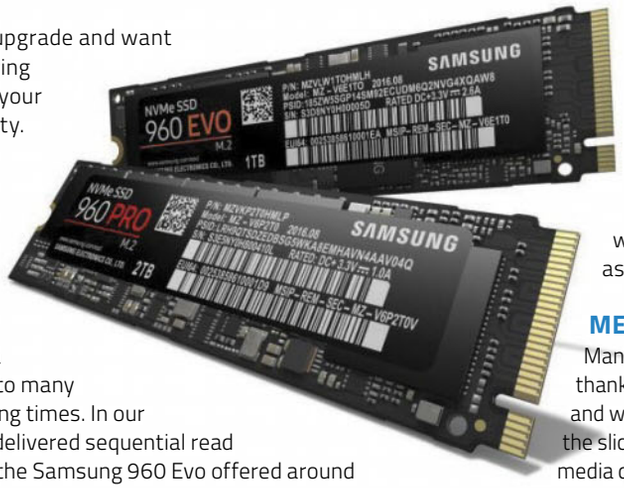
MASTERBOX LITE 5 RGB CASE

The MasterBox Lite 5 RGB ATX Case is your straightforward option for your PC build that doesn't ignore good looks, customisation, or performance. It comes standard with 3 pcs 120 mm RGB Fans, installed behind a sleek DarkMirror front panel.

With three custom trim colours included it's a great entry point for customisation. The spacious interior features black coating and a PSU cover that allows for easy, clean configurations for your build. It also comes with a 4mm thick tempered glass side panel to show your internals. And with support for up to 4 cooling fans in total and a watercooling system, we ensure your performance will not suffer.

THE SPEED TO DO IT ALL

Upgrade to Samsung NVME SSD for Perfect Gaming and Media Performance



When you consider your next upgrade and want to see an improvement in gaming and media performance, then your storage should be a high priority. If your current rig uses hard drives for your game installs and media then you're in for a treat when you install a Samsung NVMe SSD. Even coming from a SATA SSD will deliver appreciable gains.

There are tangible benefits a Samsung NVMe SSD can bring to many games. The first is in pure loading times. In our testing, the Samsung 960 Pro delivered sequential read speeds of 3,500MB/sec, while the Samsung 960 Evo offered around 3,200MB/sec. Compare that to a typical SATA SSD and its average speeds of around 600MB/sec, or a hard drive that struggles to achieve 100MB/sec. This sequential read time means game worlds can load much faster. For single player gaming that means less time watching the dreaded 'loading' screen, and for many multiplayer games it can mean being amongst the first players in the server.

Samsung NVMe SSDs also deliver astonishing random read and write performance, and that's especially useful for games that need to access many smaller files – such as a heavily modded open world game like Skyrim or Fallout 4. It all equates to smoother gameplay without any stutters or pauses typically associated with hard drives or slower SSDs.

MEDIA

Many of us are now amateur video editors, thanks to high res cameras in our smartphones, and with a Samsung NVMe SSD we can enjoy the slick operations professionals expect. Loading media quickly isn't only a boon for content creation, accessing media on a Samsung NVMe SSD is close to instant, and running multiple streams of 4k or even 8k is no stress at all.

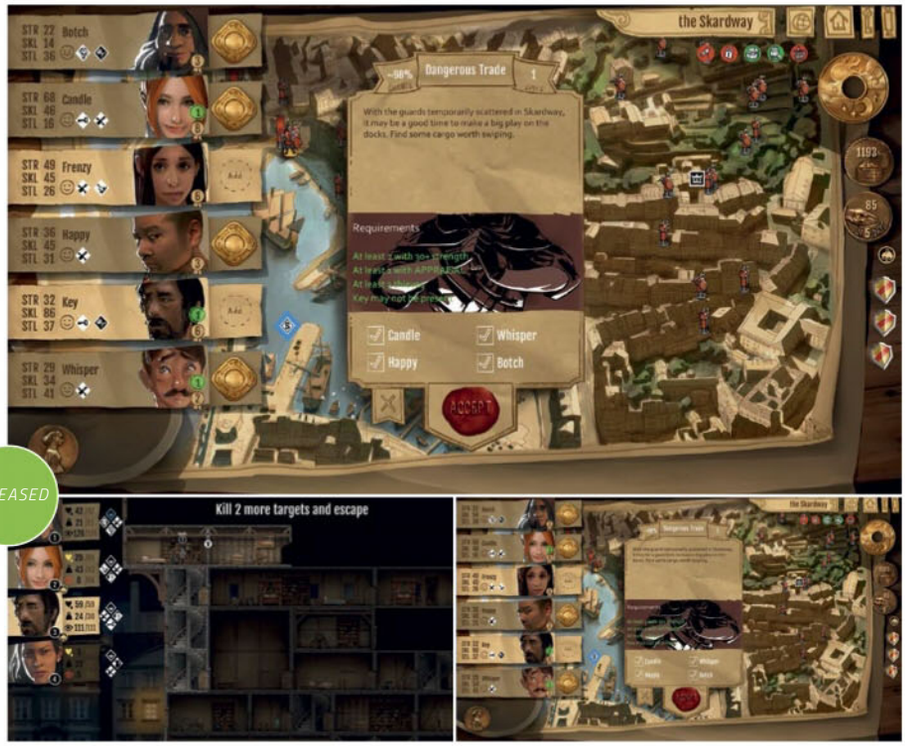
It all makes for a snappy and responsive PC that's a delight to use, with no frustrations or performance issues that test our patience. If you want to free your PC of annoying bottlenecks then a Samsung NVMe is the way to go.

A Collection Aside

It has been a month for obsession with gameplay systems. From difficult party stealth to optimal arrangements of pretty gems, **MEGHANN O'NEILL** has been preoccupied with quietly, and not so quietly, taking people out. Yes, including in the Match-3 game. She tried to get help from a videogame therapist, but that was just a gateway into a Lovecraftian murder mystery. So join us in dark, but also twinkly and colourful, places.

KILLERS AND THIEVES

DEVELOPER ALEX THOMAS
PRICE $20
killersandthieves.com



RELEASED

I know I'm going to love a game when I have to alt-tab out of it to take notes about the pre-game selection screen. In this case, it was exciting to have to choose how many days thieves should stay in prison when captured, before I knew literally anything about gameplay or context. Uncharacteristically, I chose an easier option. (It was that ominous.) Many hours in, I've come to suspect that thieves who train with high morale might get better results for their time and experience. Was curtailing tavern visits for all but the most traitorous thieves a mistake?

Every choice in Killers and Thieves has consequences, especially the ones you don't realise you're making. As a party-based stealth game, heisting raises a host of questions. Who needs to fight? Who is most anonymous? Who can climb out a window and fall three stories, when guards enter the building? Who is indispensable? Who can you allow to die? These questions are largely answered by how you build characters, with abilities, and by always boosting their base statistics through training, but it's a delicate balancing act.

As characters gain experience, they can spend one point to bolster strength, skill or stealth. Strength, for example, adds hit points and allows for carrying more loot. For three points, you can buy acrobatics, prowling, vigilance or appraisal. Prowling allows a thief to move while hidden, anonymity then dropping more slowly while you're acting dubiously. This is particularly effective when combined with a high stealth stat. Five points buys climbing, alchemy, eavesdrop, knife fighting or lockpicking, with the latter two being essential for most heists.

Of course, a thief can't gain experience unless they're heisting or completing missions. Using low level thieves with a specific, requisite ability for a non-heist mission is a good idea, as is taking a "newbie" along on basic heists, but they do have to actively participate or they'll leave with no experience gain. And, you can't keep your thieves unless you pay them and their morale remains high. Time has to be invested in staking out new areas, to find taverns and high value houses to rob. Fencing stolen goods through an optimal store yields extra money.

The heists, playing out on 2D scenes, generated to be district-specific, are most difficult when you're following the story's progression. No matter how carefully you prepare, a great manager of thieves must be flexible. Heists initially terrified me. Now, my fighters skulk at the bottom of staircases, ready to murder a guard, or liberate a captured friend. Or, after their anonymity drops, they run from building to building, closing doors behind them. I always eavesdrop before entering a building, and I'll close windows when I suspect someone will have to scale a wall.

Killers and Thieves is not for the faint of heart. Characters will be killed in a moment of stupid panic, possibly caused when the control scheme requires several actions to be taken but you're only one player. If you've built the character carefully over several hours, replacing them will genuinely hurt. But, like me, you may find yourself absolutely intoxicated by the party stealth experience, getting ever greedier for every uncommon honeymead sold to unwitting customers, and noticing ever more ways the game's systems and statistics are interacting with each other.

> "you can't keep your thieves unless you pay them and their morale remains high"

Alex Thomas

Designer and Developer

Given how obsessed I became with the intricate inner workings of this game, as well as the fact that I'm contributing music (and occasional other things) to a stealth game myself, I decided I needed to ask designer, Alex Thomas, some further questions, on his development process, and heisting strategies.

How did the idea for this complicated game initially form and then grow?

This game went through more iterations than I expected. I looked at it from the perspective of running a thieves' guild, what that would involve and building the systems around that. It made sense that everything would be a balancing act for the player. The risk is in making something too unfamiliar and confusing, instead of safe and predictable.

What aspects of the game/economy were hardest to balance?

Stats, economy and difficulty aren't hard to adjust, since these are all data values we can easily manipulate and test. The trick is in accommodating a lot of different players. At one point we had classic easy, normal and hard difficulty options, but players would refuse to deviate from normal, even if they really should. Instead, we exposed the three most important factors that influence the difficulty and let the player choose their preference without any implied judgment.

Were there any abilities/or concepts left on the cutting room floor?

The idea of running a thieves' guild was ripe for cool ideas. At one point there was a boardgame aspect to taking over territory, like Risk, against rival thieves. We had other abilities in mind, including subtle magic use, ranged combat options, guard dogs and other mission types like breaking thieves out of jail. Something that's rarely talked about is that production isn't a linear curve. The larger and more complex a game, the harder it becomes to add new content without unintended side effects.

What range of emotions did you want players to feel during heists?

The basic idea is that the player starts simple and unsure of themselves, but gains the skill to become an expert. By the end of the game, it should feel like you're running circles around the guards and literally getting away with murder. It was meant to give the player a sense of satisfaction from improvement, not just via stats but their own ability.

What was most challenging about developing the UI and control scheme?

By far the biggest problem was explaining everything to the player. In terms of party-stealth, I can't think of many games that even attempt it, because it's difficult to micromanage more than one character at a time. The way Killers works is that everything is designed to buy the player time; hiding, fighting, slow escort of prisoners out of the scene. You can strategically position your thieves and get good at using them as a cohesive unit, but it takes practice.

Is there anything to be learned about releasing a game without a preview/early access period?

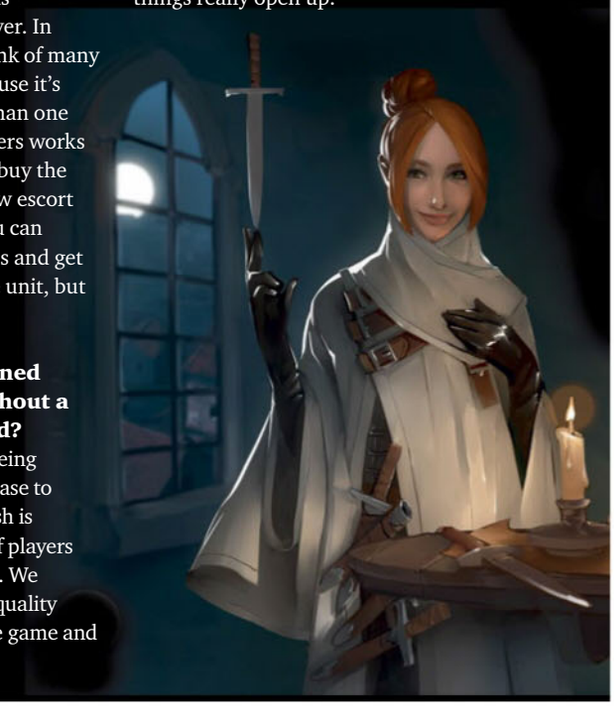
I'd say it was a mistake, if I'm being honest. Players expect a final release to be flawless, and that level of polish is almost impossible without tons of players finding bugs and giving feedback. We had professional playtesters and quality assurance companies work on the game and still didn't get the kind of full coverage that we needed.

Who is your favourite character and how do you build them?

For a long time, Botch was named "Potato" because his stats were locked as a "worst-case thief", so he lived an existence of constant failure. In the final game he has the chance to reach his full potential; he literally has the highest "potential", a hidden stat that affects random stat gains from training. Free tip! (*Oh great, another stat I haven't been optimising for - Meghann.*)

What is your favourite heist strategy?

I like to take four thieves, bring out a combination of three to cover visibility, mobility and lockpicking, and keep one knife fighter in reserve in case things go wrong. Once you get to the upper levels and train multiple abilities on your thieves, things really open up.



RELEASED

OAFMATCH

DEVELOPER NCR GAMES
PRICE $7
store.steampowered.com/app/554220/Oafmatch

Please don't tell me Match-3 games aren't hardcore. I mean, we can discuss the time I got so close to making a triple castle in Triple Town that I was, "late for school pickup because of traffic, I'm so sorry, Son's Teacher," if you like. Let's not. Oafmatch has triggered a similar few weeks of bad parenting. But I can stop playing any time I want to. I just don't want to. And you can't make me. And you don't know what it's like to have my life and if I want to match pretty gems while cleverly powering up my Level 2 Staff of Wind, who are you to judge?

The problem stems from the fact that this is also an RPG, and quite a beautifully balanced and hilariously written one. It's like Card Hunter meets Ticket to Earth, expressed as an ever-cascading tapestry of seven colours. This one time, I realised that if I matched low damage blue gems, I could power up my Ring of Insight, thereby allowing me to transform two standard gems into white gems, therefore connecting and collecting five of them to heal the party, thanks to taking the Cleric along, thus narrowly surviving the pirate dressed in a rum barrel.

I'm sorry, I had to get that out. This game makes you feel amazing, but only sometimes, which is part of its addictive allure. It's not like a poker machine, where you're relying on luck for that hit of happy brain chemistry. You totally figured out a smart way to manipulate gems, weapons, items and context yourself. It's just a more difficult game than it initially appears to be, because the odds are often stacked against you and the AI plays well. Learning happens incrementally, as you progress through the campaign and unlock characters and items.

So there was this other time where I could either match three red or purple. Again the Cleric's robes would heal with purple, but he also had a healing Holy Charm that could be activated with white gems later. Knuckles the Oaf's Brutesword could be activated with six red gems and I had three, but the incredible Horn of Shattering needed twelve purple and I had three. Meanwhile, the enemy party still had a character capable of matching

> "but the incredible Horn of Shattering needed twelve purple and I had three"

gems and was collecting purple to power-up a Groenling's damage-causing, but purple-spreading, Ick Bomb.

I ended up matching purple and losing Knuckles before the next round, being unable to resurrect him by matching the gem on which he was placed at death. The AI matched black, the terrain-specific gem, triggering a Pleasant Breeze, which granted two mana of every colour to the enemy team. There was some nasty business involving a Rampaging Earth Spirit and it was all over. Until I came back stronger, after re-attempting several previous levels on high difficulties and winning new items/upgrades that were more powerful.

I mean, I don't know another Match-3 game where you can fight with a Poisoned Ham. The party banter also suggests the designers know their RPG tropes. For example, "Knuckles is genuine. He recently bit off a man's hand," "Well, that's ghastly, yet convenient," "Why am I the only person disturbed by the bitten off hand?" Don't expect Dragon Age. Also, don't expect me to pick up your kids from school any time soon. Just stop judging me and join me. What's your favourite colour? Red, green, yellow, white, blue, purple, black? Mine's definitely white.

THE INFECTIOUS MADNESS OF DOCTOR DEKKER

DEVELOPER D'AVEKKI STUDIOS
PRICE $10
www.doctordekker.com

RELEASED

Having enjoyed Her Story, where you're a police investigator drawing out narrative with keywords and creativity, I was ripe for another mystery delivered in hundreds of disordered video chunks. The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker has you as a therapist, and you've inherited an unusual collection of clients from your predecessor, who has recently died. There's the gravedigger, the rich wife, the nurse, the free spirit and the sad supermarket worker. Soon enough, they're much more, but it will take time for their peculiarities to emerge.

Unlike with Her Story, I found myself initially progressing very slowly. This game is not for people frustrated by finicky parsers requiring precise phrases and word combinations. Luckily, however, I was on a 12 hour train journey to Melbourne, so I had time to thoroughly acquaint myself with sentence structure, between Devonshire teas. One hint I was given was, "He wants to know if you can help him. I should answer yes or no." So, I tried yes, no, I can help you, I cannot help you, I can't help you, help, help you and so on. The correct response was, "yes/no help."

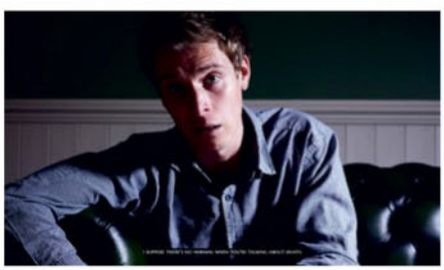
Answering the game's questions requires a keyword and either yes or no. Progressing the plot is more a case of repeating something important that the character has said, like active listening. Unlike in Her Story, there are few opportunities to deduce what is happening and then successfully try a keyword you've never heard, but which should make perfect sense to try. Instead, you're constantly guessing how designers might expect you to phrase questions, trying to find synonyms for words like "murder" or accurately spell medications.

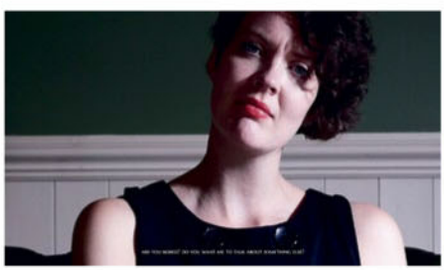
> you're constantly guessing how designers might expect you to phrase questions

The unusual corollary of an underdeveloped system for player input is that the in-game hint system becomes essential to how you play, because phrasing dissonance is often revealed here; I knew I was supposed to ask about the creature, I just didn't realise it needed extra keywords. So, basic greetings can be conducted between hint cooldowns, which I stopped thinking of as hints and started thinking of as my character musing aloud. The parser issue is not insignificant, but I was so hooked by the story that I played feverishly to the end, regardless.

Why? Firstly, I never stopped wanting to know more about these people. You can advise them in ways that have observable results, too, which can lead to some very tense moments. Exceptional acting meant that I was always thoroughly engaged with dialogue. Narrative threads weave together to create an organic understanding of what is actually happening and some aspects are simple, but the overall structure is complex. And, when you meet "side characters," including the wonderful receptionist, you immediately understand their context.

There was one moment, however, involving sexual violence, where content crossed a line for me. The situation did make sense, in the context of the plot and characters, but it feels as if the The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker's writers may not have thoughtfully considered the interactive setting, for player agency, as well as for the parser. But, the unfolding narrative is very much suited to this style of delivery. So yes, this is frequently difficult to play, but thoroughly compelling. I'd like to see where these developers could take the genre next. PC





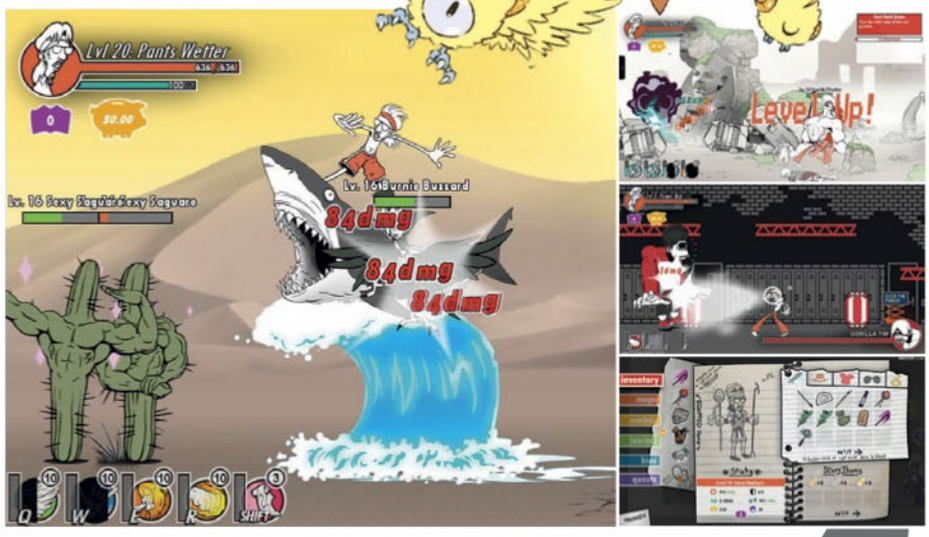
10 to Watch

Future Grind

DEVELOPER MILKBAG GAMES
PUBLISHER MILKBAG GAMES
DUE 2017
www.futuregrind.net

1

▼ Stunt racers are great fun, and Future Grind looks to be a blast. In a futuristic city in which a number of blue and red floating rails make up the race tracks, players pilot motorcycles with similarly coloured wheels. Only blue wheels can drive on blue and red on red, so jumping and flipping through the air is the order of the day.



2

Super Daryl Deluxe

DEVELOPER DAN & GARY GAMES
PUBLISHER DAN & GARY GAMES
DUE 2018
danandgarygames.com/superdaryldeluxe

▲ Described as a 2D comedy action RPG, Super Daryl Deluxe looks like what you'd get if you tried to make Napoleon Dynamite the beat 'em up and then hit it with a light dusting of Scott Pilgrim and some Metroidvania for good measure. Daryl is your typical awkward headband sporting and bellbottomed teen who must fight against the evil forces of the self-aware authors that control the school.

3

The Eldritch Zookeeper

DEVELOPER CRANKTRAIN
PUBLISHER CRANKTRAIN
DUE SOON
cranktrain.com/the-eldritch-zookeeper

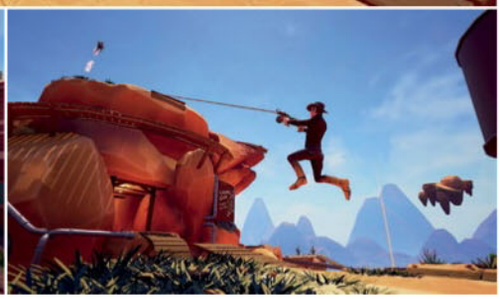
Wedged somewhere between Theme Park Manager and a survival sim like Don't Starve sits The Eldritch Zookeeper. You're a zookeeper, cursed by a dapper skeleton to run a monster zoo. Every day a new creature from the nether arrives. You have to feed it, tend to it and keep it from rampaging and making the visitors to the park scream and bleed as they are being eaten. Can you succeed? Probably not.

4

The Forgettable Dungeon

DEVELOPER ANTHONY ROTONDO
PUBLISHER HAPPY BOX GAMES LLC
DUE SOON
www.odnotor.com/ForgettableDungeon

OK. A pixel is a single point in a flat image (this is a very basic definition, sure). A Voxel is a 3D pixel. The forgettable Dungeon is a 3D game designed to look like it's made of pixels, so everything is essentially flat, even though it has some depth. Join up to 15 friends to battle your way through the 3D pixel dungeons in search for new loot, bigger and better bosses and greater challenges. If you can't find a friend, the game can also be played offline solo.



5

Sky Noon

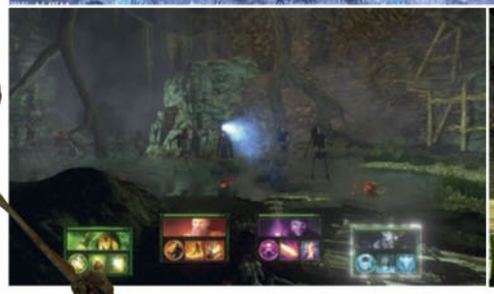
DEVELOPER LUNAR ROOSTER
PUBLISHER LUNAR ROOSTER
DUE SOON
lunarrooster.com

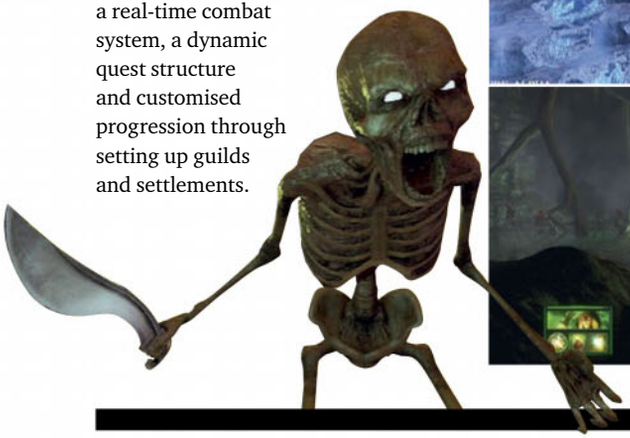
Does anyone remember the amazing Quake 3 Arena mod, Bouncy? The mod removed weapon damage and instead gave each weapon a unique knockback effect. Players died when they fell off a level. Each character was also equipped with a grapple that could be used for movement of to try and stop a fall. Sky Noon appears to take this idea a step further with a cowboy theme and a lasso to drag enemies or items closer to the player.

Battlecursed

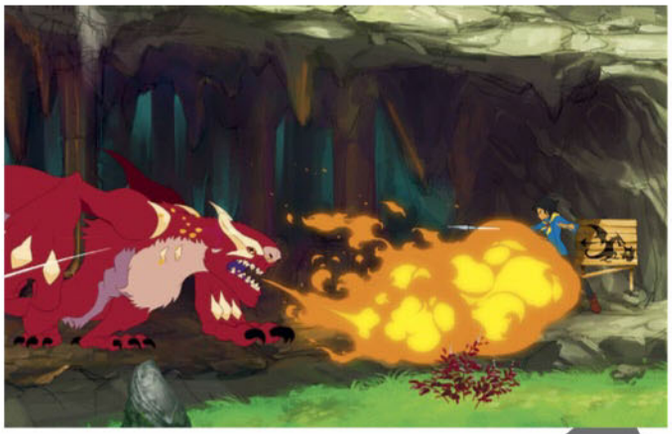
6

DEVELOPER CODEX WORLDS
PUBLISHER CODEX WORLDS
DUE LATE 2018
battlecursed.com





Battlecursed looks like an old-school dungeon crawler in the best possible way, with a combination of Rogue-like random dungeon generation, permadeath and some serious challenge when it comes to combat. That said, the game doesn't skimp on the mod cons either, with some great looking graphics, a real-time combat system, a dynamic quest structure and customised progression through setting up guilds and settlements.



Battle Chef Brigade

7

DEVELOPER TRINKET STUDIOS
PUBLISHER ADULT SWIM GAMES
DUE TBA
www.battlechefbrigade.com

Part 2D hack and slash game with RPG-lite progression, and part match-three puzzle game, Battle Chef Brigade puts players in the sensible shoes of a chef in the most gruelling culinary competition of the fantasy world. Players must hunt for creatures they need for ingredients and then create their dishes by solving puzzles. There are four playable chefs, each with their own campaign as well as Puzzle Rush and Break the Targets modes as well.

Spartan Fist

DEVELOPER GLASS BOTTOM GAMES
PUBLISHER GLASS BOTTOM GAMES
DUE 2018
spartanfist.com

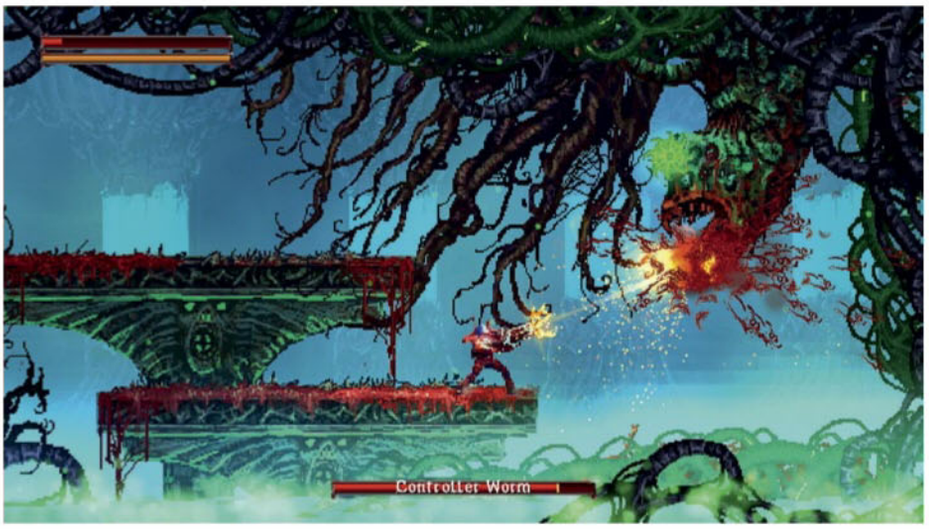
A voxel based arena brawler in which you can punch enemies so hard they explode into bloody red cubes, Spartan Fist places players in the polygonal shoes of Emma Jones, a down and out detective trying to find the fabled Spartan Fist. To do this you'll have to punch your way through Rogue-like arenas, punching the polys out of all comers until you can make it to the top of the heap.

Unto the End

DEVELOPER 2 TON STUDIOS
PUBLISHER DIGITAL UPPERCUT PRODUCTIONS
DUE 2018
2tonstudios.com/unto

9

▼ Most action games put the camera up close to the action so you can enjoy every jump and kill, but Unto the End, a beautiful, minimalist looking action adventure game does the opposite, pulling the character far back, making your warrior on a path of revenge a tiny figure dwarfed by the unforgiving landscape. A creature killed your family and took everything from you, so you'll do anything and travel anywhere for vengeance.



Valfaris

DEVELOPER STEEL MANTIS
PUBLISHER DIGITAL UPPERCUT PRODUCTIONS
DUE 2018
digitaluppercutproductions.com

▲ From the developers of the flawed but still pretty rad heavy metal inspired pixel action platformer, Slain: Back From Hell comes Valfaris, a pixel art sci-fi Metroidvania game with a metal soundtrack courtesy of Curt Victor Bryant (of Celtic Frost) and art design ripped straight from '70s and '80s metal album covers (with a dash of Roger Dean, the artist behind all those rad Yes covers) and a side order of Heavy Metal magazine.

10

WE DID NAZI THAT COMING

DANIEL WILKS witnesses the alt-history rise of the alt-right... and punches it in the face.

WOLFENSTEIN II: THE NEW COLOSSUS

DEVELOPER MACHINEGAMES
PUBLISHER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
DUE OCTOBER 27
wolfenstein.bethesda.net

Arcade Berg is the Senior Game Designer at MachineGames, making him the man to go to for the answers to any questions we might have about the upcoming Nazi alternate history game, Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus. For those unfamiliar with Wolfenstein, the long running series has gone through a number of iterations over the years, first appearing in 1981, but really coming to popular attention in 1992 with the launch of Wolfenstein 3D, the first game in the series to feature the now synonymous series hero, American soldier-cum-spy, William "B.J." Blazkowicz. After a sequel/expansion in the same year, Wolfenstein fell quiet for almost another decade before being rebooted with the 2001 FPS Return to Castle Wolfenstein, in which Blazkowicz faced off against Nazis as well as the undead. A multiplayer only expansion/sequel followed in 2003, and aside from another attempt to reboot the series with the 2009 supernatural shooter simply titled Wolfenstein, that was the last anyone heard of the series and B.J. until 2014 and the launch of the start of a new series with Wolfenstein: The New Order. Unlike previous games, The New Order wasn't a WWII shooter with some Nazi occult elements, but was instead set in an alternate history in which the Nazis won the war and conquered the world.

Time has not been particularly kind to B.J. Blazkowicz. When he first started murdering the hell out of Nazis he was little more than a sentient grimace and a hand. Later, when fighting against zombies and other supernatural baddies he was a rather stereotypical gruff man of action with about as much depth as his stubble. Given the treatment the character has had since appearing in The New Order, the first question we had to ask Arcade was this – what the hell does MachineGames have against B.J. Blazkowicz? "He seems to have a bit of bad luck but we love him."

Mr Berg's comment is a bit of an understatement. After the first mission in

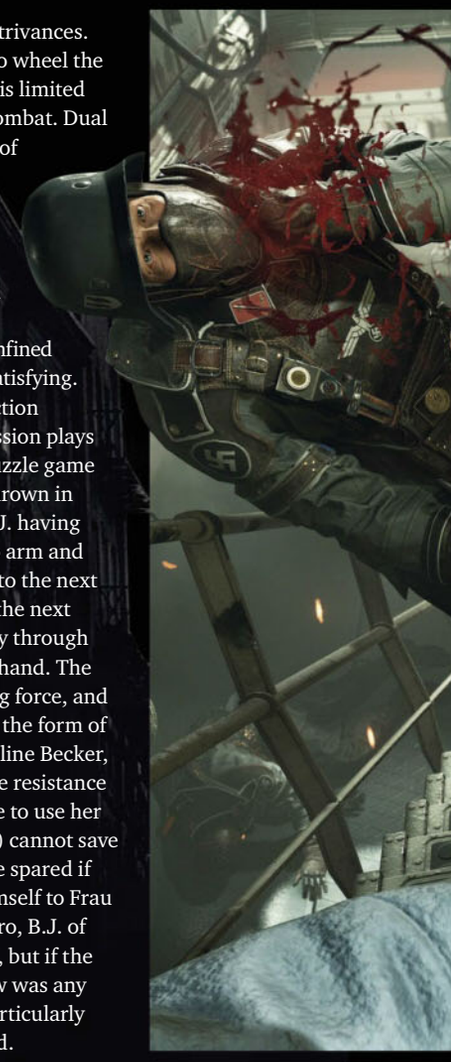
The New Order, Blazkowicz is left with cranial trauma and languishes in a coma for 14 years, waking to find that all his friends are dead and the Nazis won the war. The last mission sees him wounded even more severely. When we're reintroduced to Blazkowicz in Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus he is a shell of a man; a mass of scar tissue, failing organs and useless legs. He's also spent another five months in a coma. He seems to like those. "We just want to see him grow and be a strong badass character." explained Arcade, "It could seem that there's some spite there but we like him, I think we're all fans."

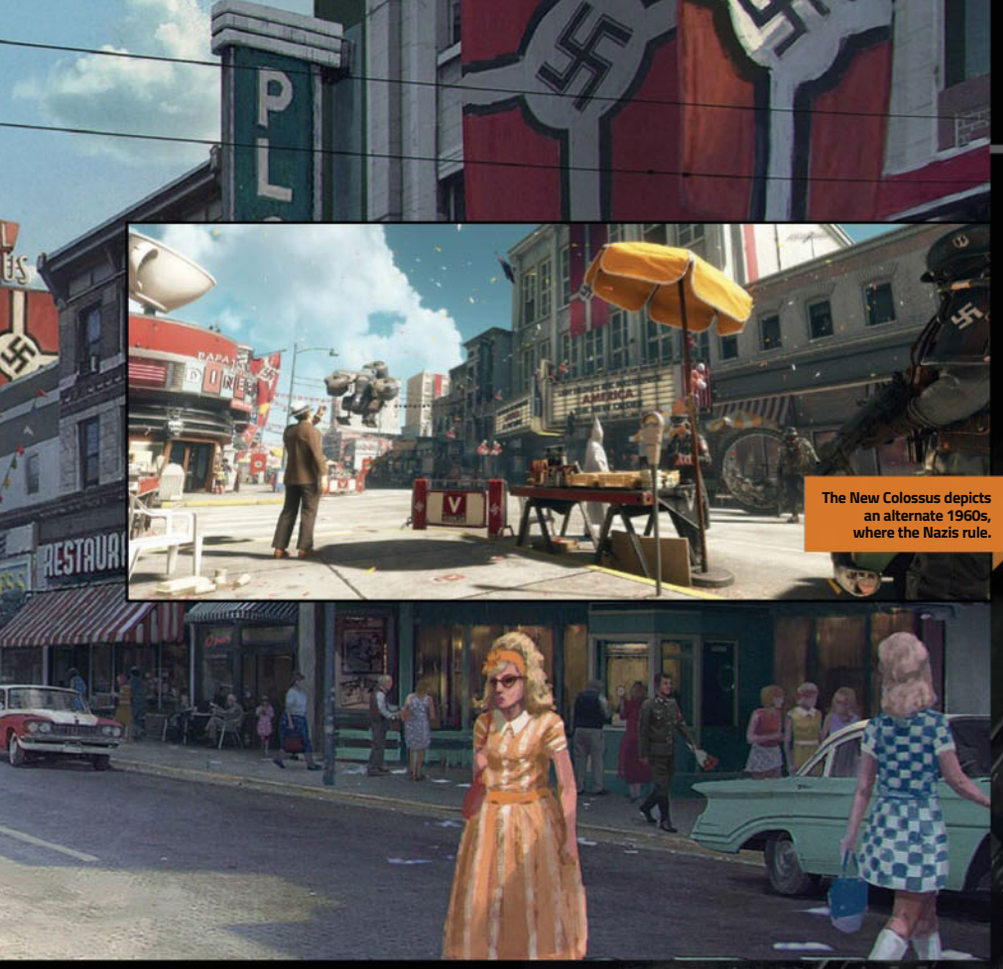
We've played two missions of Wolfenstein II and they couldn't be more different from each other. The first mission we played, presumably the first given that it begins with B.J. waking from another coma feels kind of fitting for both the character and the series so far. The opening mission of The New Order was in no way indicative of the game that was to follow; the first mission in The New Colossus (or at least the first we played) felt somewhat divorced from the second we played in a mechanical sense. That said, the mission showed a level of nuance and humour mostly absent from the opening of The New Order, making it the far superior outing. In it, Blazkowicz wakes from his coma at the best/worst time possible, the forces of Frau Irene Engel have discovered the submarine base of the remaining resistance members and are hell-bent on capturing Blazkowicz and extracting revenge for his killing of Oberstgrupperfuhrer Wilhelm "Deathshead" Strasse in the first game, as well as the mutilation of her face.

In his weakened state, B.J. isn't a man of action so much as a broken man with a mission. The mission charges him with navigating his way through the sub to find his heavily pregnant lady love, Anya and hopefully escape the clutches of angry, revenge minded Nazis. Dragging himself across the ground training his useless legs behind himself, B.J. muscles himself into a wheelchair, grabs a gun and does his best impression of a remarkably fragile tank. Being confined to a wheelchair limits movement speed as well as movement options. Stairs can be traversed, but only down, so trying to ascend the levels is a matter of finding lifts, moving walkways, conveyor belts and other mechanical contrivances. Needing to use one hand to wheel the chair also means that B.J. is limited in how he can approach combat. Dual wielding appears to be out of the question, and stealth isn't the easiest thing to achieve when you're on wheels. That said, sneaking up on a Nazi and murdering him with your bare hands when you're confined to a chair is pretty damn satisfying.

> "B.J. muscles himself into a wheelchair and does his best tank impression"

Rather than being an action spectacle, the opening mission plays more like a first-person puzzle game with occasional murder thrown in to spice things up, with B.J. having to work out which traps to arm and disarm to give him access to the next area, or how to ascend to the next level. After making his way through the ship, salvation isn't at hand. The Nazis are an overwhelming force, and even an avenging angel in the form of a power-armour clad Caroline Becker, leader of the Kreisau Circle resistance network (a paraplegic able to use her legs thanks to the armour) cannot save the crew. They will only be spared if Blazkowicz surrenders himself to Frau Engel. Being a genuine hero, B.J. of course surrenders himself, but if the snippet of cutscene we saw was any indication, Nazis aren't particularly good at keeping their word.





The New Colossus depicts an alternate 1960s, where the Nazis rule.

You can take stairs in a wheelchair, but only in one direction.

In the trailer for The New Colossus debuted at E3, a cutscene showed Blazkowicz fully armoured in the cybernetic suit, and in-game footage shows his hands armoured, brushing bullets aside and taking down Nazis. Although B.J. was clearly wearing the armour under his clothes in the second mission we played enabling him to walk and function like a regular, somewhat scarred human being, no other functionality of the suit was available. Given the cutscene in the trailer, we assume that at some point in the game Blazkowicz will be able to access the full capabilities of the armour (most probably for limited periods before needing to recharge). We asked Arcade about how the armour would come into play but instead of answering the question he simply told us to, "Play it and find out."

The second mission we played saw Blazkowicz having to infiltrate a secret underground Nazi base in Roswell, New Mexico, Area 52, to place a portable nuclear bomb and let the rest of America (and the world) know that the resistance is alive and well. The cutscene proceeding the mission featured a cast of new and returning characters, one of whom really stood out: Frau Engel's own daughter (mercilessly emotionally abused by her mother in the first mission). While this may add a little nuance to one of the Nazi characters, Arcade assured us that we didn't have to worry about feeling bad for shooting Nazis in the face. "It's a fictitious rendering and it's the whole Nazi concept in Wolfenstein is like a hive mind. You are killing the Nazi threat, like it's one big ball of Nazi. We're not trying to portray this family man working to support his two children in America."

The mission opens with Blazkowicz dressed as a fireman. This disguise serves two purposes. B.J. is the most wanted man in America and his face is on posters everywhere, so the outfit gives him some degree of anonymity. It also gives him a reason to be carrying around a bulky fire extinguisher, the housing for the portable nuke. The streets of small town America are a twisted mirror image of nostalgic Americana. Newsies yell the headlines from street corners, but the headlines are about sedition and the power of the Reich. Klansmen proudly wear their sheets in public, but if you take the time to listen in on their conversations

they come across as little more than uneducated rednecks. A military parade makes its way down Main Street, but instead of returned war heroes, goose-stepping, jackbooted Stormtroopers deliver an intimidating display of power and precision. Greasy spoon diners sell German food.

B.J. makes his way to a diner to meet a contact who can get him into Area 52. After a brutal but necessary murder – Blazkowicz is recognised by a Nazi in a confrontation reminiscent of the bar scene in Inglourious Basterds – he is led into what can only be described as a conspiracy theorist's evidence bunker. The contact is sure that the Nazis have been working with space aliens to take over the world, and nothing B.J. says can dissuade him of the idea. The rant is funny and oddly touching, highlighting one of the real strengths of the writing of the new Wolfenstein series, the heady combination of pathos and dark comedy. To get into Area 52, all Blazkowicz has to do is infiltrate a Nazi base, hijack a train and then ride the train to his destination. Once there he must again make his way through a military base, plant the portable nuke in the base's nuclear reactor so it can't be discovered, recovered or defused and then escape without falling afoul of the guards and the giant Nazi robot, the Obercommando. Easy, right?

First hijacking the train and then infiltrating Area 52 proper showed off a lot more of what makes the Wolfenstein games so mechanically satisfying, with players free to approach combat how they see fit. As with the previous games, players are rewarded for playing the game rather than the way the developers intend, unlocking upgrades through stealth and run and gun combat equally. A range of new weapons and enemies mix things up nicely. Heavily armoured shock troopers dual wielding heavy cutting lasers are a genuine threat capable of doing serious damage at range and knocking down B.J. up close. Fast and erratically moving robots are another new threat. Nearly impossible to target with anything other than an automatic shotgun, these robots aren't heavy hitters but can really pose a problem if not disposed of.

There are three major changes to combat that really change up how the game plays. Blazkowicz is no longer armed with a knife for stealth takedowns and melee attacks. This time around he wields a hatchet, and the difference isn't nearly as small as you would think. In The New Order, completing stealth objectives could unlock up to three thrown knives for distance stealth takedowns. These knives were extremely powerful and capable of killing pretty much any enemy silently at quite a range. The hatchet can still be thrown, but it no longer has the straight trajectory of the knife, meaning that players have to judge an arc when aiming for a distance stealth kill. The weight of the hatchet also makes it a more visceral and ugly weapon at close range, giving melee combat a really satisfying edge.

> "all weapons have an upgrade path so players can customise their play style"

Although we didn't have a chance to experience it, all weapons, new and returning, now have an upgrade path allowing players to customise the handling of weapons to suit their play style. Previously only a few weapons could be upgrades in a linear path – adding a silencer to a pistol or increasing the power of a laser cutter. Now each weapon will have multiple avenues for upgrade and specialisation. As Arcade explained, "A lot of the upgrades are not necessarily just better for every player, there's something changes that might not suit you. For example, a fully automatic rifle could be modded to more powerful single fire, right? That's great for the people who would like to aim and maybe are a bit calmer in a tactical sense, whereas a player just wanting to cause mayhem, he might go for other things that just makes the whole thing more chaotic, but it's not the very precise weapon anymore. I think that's where we now take a -- like a side turn on what the Wolfenstein arsenal is."

For Arcade, and we dare say, a number of players, the biggest and most exciting change when it comes to combat is the new approach to dual wielding weapons. In the past, B.J. was capable of wielding a weapon in each hand under the proviso that the weapons were the same – two pistols, two shotguns, two assault rifles, etc. That is no longer the case. In Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus, players can wield any weapon in each hand. "Separate weapons, that's something I wanted from before day one. I was like, 'we need this because we were now stable in dual wielding'. You can dual wield with assault rifles, you can dual wield with shotguns in The New Order and all that. This is what we do now, this is like - this is

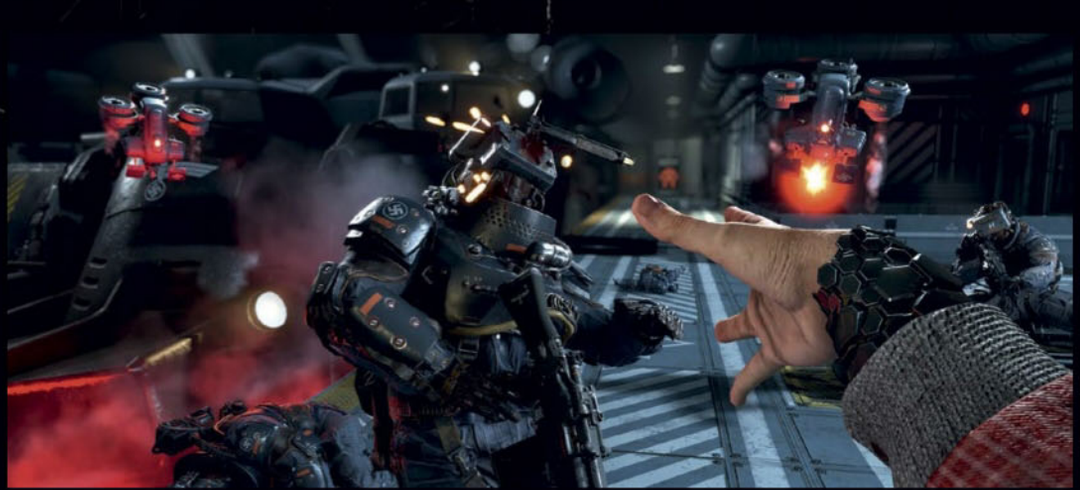
B.J. can now dual wield different weapons in each hand.

B.J.'s only goal is to give the Nazis das boot up the ass.

what defines us. We need to take this even further. It's not a hard concept to develop, but to have to program and animate to figure everything out is hard. They [the programmers] weren't as happy."

Having a different weapon in each hand opens up a wealth of possibilities when it comes to approach. Someone more attuned to the stealth approach could carry a silenced pistol in one hand for silent takedowns, and an auto shotgun in the other just in case things go bad and you don't have time to switch weapons. Of course, having those different approaches and weapon sizes made life even more difficult for the programmers according to Berg. "It was such a beast. We have this full body, when you look down you actually have your entire body. It's not just a floating camera in space, there's so much for fidelity. You are in the world. You are there. When you fall over you see everything. It puts a lot of pressure and challenges for us to make everything work with reloading and switching weapon and stuff with the two different weapons. We made it so much worse [*for the coders*], but we nailed it."

After planting the bomb, the massive, mortar spewing Obercommando comes out to say hi. Again players have the choice of how they want to approach the fight. The robot can be destroy with overwhelming firepower, can be taken down by targeting weak points on the back, or even avoided altogether if players decide to beat feet instead of going toe-to-toe with a Nazi superweapon. Win and leave head held high or simply run away and the result is the same – Blazkowicz reaches a relatively safe distance, detonates the nuke and sends a rather unsubtle message to the Nazi leadership. B.J. is back and he means business. We can't wait to help him take down the Reich when the game releases in a few short months time. *DANIEL WILKS* PC



BLOODSTAINED: RITUAL OF THE NIGHT

DEVELOPER INTI CREATES
PUBLISHER 505 GAMES
DUE TBA
www.fangamer.com/a/kindling/bloodstained

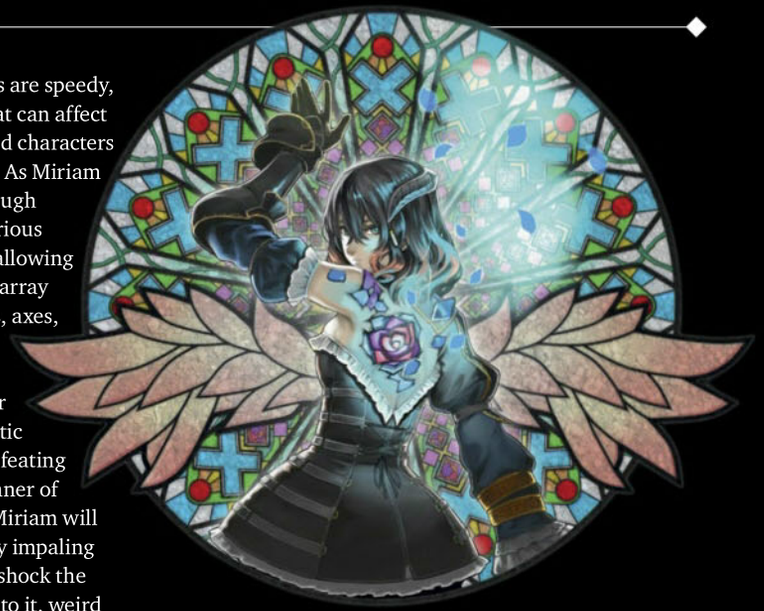
Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night has some serious expectations to live up to. Not just because it's the brainchild of Koji Igarashi (known to his fans as "IGA"), the brain behind many of Konami's later Castlevania titles, but because it was one of the most high-profile gaming Kickstarter of recent memory. With other big gaming Kickstarters like Mighty No. 9 and Yooka-Laylee leaving fans cold, there's understandably a bit of trepidation about how Bloodstained will turn out. Well, good news: it's coming along, it plays great, and it feels like an IGA Castlevania game through and through.

Young Miriam is an average girl living in 18th century England. Well, normal except for the alchemist's curse she's been stuck with that's trapped a bunch of magical crystals inside her body. After being asleep for a decade, she wakes up to find that the alchemists who did this to her also had a little demon-summoning experiment that went horribly awry, and now there's a castle filled with unholy horrors. Time to kill some demons, collect a bunch of ability-granting items, and explore every nook and cranny of the castle to fill out that map!

When you first pick up Bloodstained, you'll notice just how fluidly Miriam controls. Though the game is rendered in 2.5D rather than 2D sprites, Miriam's movements and animations are speedy, without any of the "lag" that can affect the feel of polygon-rendered characters in a 2D sidescrolling world. As Miriam jumps, runs, and kicks through the castle, she'll pick up various equipment along the way, allowing her to equip and use a vast array of weapons: swords, knives, axes, and yes – whips.

The abilities Miriam collects, however, affect her play in considerably dramatic ways. Occasionally after defeating foes, they'll drop some manner of crystallised ability, which Miriam will then absorb by dramatically impaling herself with it. (It's quite a shock the first time, but you get used to it, weird as that sounds.) Abilities granted include magic attacks (several of which can be aimed using the right analog stick), summoning familiars like demonic monkeys and skeletal hounds, and movement skills to help you access previously-inaccessible areas. Many of these skills consume Miriam's MP when used, so keeping tabs on when and how to use them best is crucial, especially during boss fights.

Speaking of boss fights, we got to play a boss encounter during our demo, and it's here that the game really earned its name. A sultry, demonic-looking woman, clad in a red dress, emerged from a bathtub full of dark liquid and began attacking us with a series of parasols that sprayed toxic blood with each swipe. As her HP depleted, she began covering the walls of the room with the liquid, leaving us to scramble under her aerial projectiles to shield ourselves from a rain of acid blood. It was a pretty intense fight, to say the least.



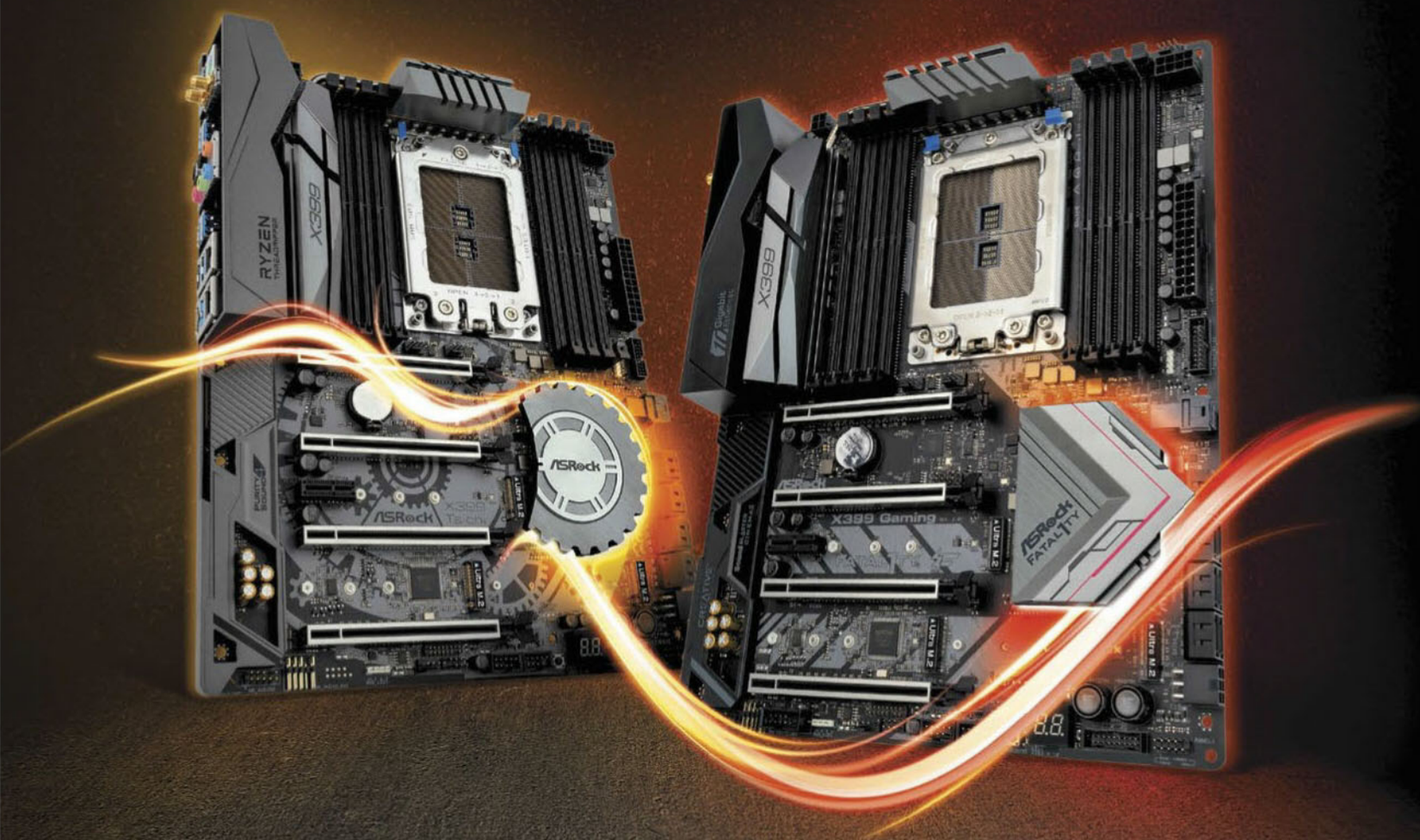
> "except for the alchemist's curse that's trapped a bunch of magical crystals in her"

Bloodstained is still a ways off – the release date is slated for a nebulous "sometime in 2018." But if that's how long it takes to make a worthy successor to games like Symphony of the Night and Aria of Sorrow, it'll be worth it. *HEIDI KEMPS* PC

The camera occasionally swivels out of its side-on view during pivotal scenes.

X399 SERIES MOTHERBOARDS

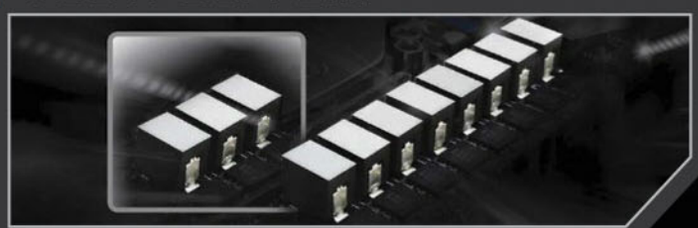
ASRock®



BEYOND EXPECTATION

AQUANTIA® 10Gb/s BASE-T ETHERNET

11 PHASE POWER, 600W SUPPORT



AMD SocketTR4 | X399

RYZEN THREADRIPPER

Gigabit Ethernet

RGB LED

www.asrock.com

The brand and product names are trademarks of their respective companies.

"How do you pronouce 'Cthulhu'?"
"I haven't the foggiest idea, mate."

Candles, altars and tentacled dudes in robes. Seems pretty faithful to us.

CALL OF **CTHULHU**

Before Warcraft, Starcraft and Minecraft, there was... Lovecraft.

DEVELOPER CYANIDE STUDIO
PUBLISHER FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE
DUE LATE 2017
www.callofcthulhu-game.com

H.P. Lovecraft's writings were incredibly influential on the horror genre; books, films, and games all owe the man a tremendous debt for establishing many of the genre conventions we tend to take for granted. Given how well-regarded his work is, though, it's somewhat puzzling how few games are based in the universe he helped establish. While Call of Cthulhu is based on the pen-and-paper RPG of the same name, it also marks one of the few times the Lovecraftian mythos has been embodied in game form. Going from the preview session we saw at E3, this will be a hard game to put down – and we don't know if we'd escape with our sanity intact.

It's the early 1920s, and you step into the shoes of private investigator Edward Pierce. You're tasked with uncovering the mysteries of what is a mundane-seeming case on the surface: the death of a well-known artist and her son. Of course, this being a Lovecraftian horror tale, things start to become anything but mundane as you start to unravel what was really going on. Can you solve the mystery of what happened here, and, perhaps more importantly, can you do so without going mad?

The setting for the game is Darkwater Island, a dark and musty place with an unsettling air about it that's populated by a cast of equally suspicious personalities. Early in our demo, we met with a gravekeeper who didn't seem particularly enthused by our presence on his grounds, even coming at us with an axe. We had to negotiate our way out of potentially dangerous situation using a dialogue tree, the results of which were determined by what the developers call the "skill sheet" – statistics like Persuasion and Intimidation that can be put to use in confrontations like this. We succeeded in calming him down first by bluffing with physical threats and then going to more peaceful conversation, eventually yielding valuable investigative information.

Investigation is the heart of this game, and much of your efforts will be spent piecing clues together to discover new truths. Later in our demo, we were investigating a scene where the fire that killed the artist and her son took place. We had a police report with us, and looked at the scene to compare it to what was written down. However, we found a few inconsistencies – the stopped clock was at a different time than that listed in the filing, and the position of objects indicated some sort of foul play.

But as Pierce gets closer to the truth, he puts his sanity at risk. The finale of our demo showcased with might happen as Pierce begins to descend into madness – as he stares at a painting,

> "we had to negotiate out of a dangerous situation using a dialogue tree"

an otherworldly horror seems to crawl out of it, poised to strike him down. The reality behind the horror must be uncovered – but at what cost?

After a lengthy time in development, Call of Cthulhu's intriguing mix of investigation and light survival-horror elements is scheduled to hit the PC later this year. Keep your wits about you – you're going to need them. *HEIDI KEMPS* PC

STRANGE **BRIGADE**

DEVELOPER REBELLION
PUBLISHER REBELLION
DUE TBA
strangebrigade.com

Borrowing heavily from the 1930s adventure serials, Strange Brigade is a four-player cooperative shooter that is best described as Left 4 Dead meets The Mummy. And I mean the light-hearted Brendan Fraser version, not that Tom Cruise rubbish. The game puts you in control of a member of a secret team of adventurers who work for the British government, investigating paranormal activity around the world.

Its tongue-in-cheek nature shines through in nearly every aspect, but is perhaps best showcased by the terribly English narrator who calls the action in real-time, though often with a twinge of hyperbole and some very distinct British-isms. "It's challenging to capture something that will [work] not just in the United Kingdom, but in other parts of the world too," said Zoltan Fejes, Lead Producer of Strange Brigade, "but we're fortunate to have a great writer on board."

Players can choose from one of four characters, each with their own special abilities. I chose Professor Archimedes De Quincy, an Oxford scholar and rifleman. Also in the Brigade is marksman named Frank Fairburne, a Maasai warrior called Natangu Rushia, and a northerner named Gracie Braithwaite.

"My favourite character is Gracie, the engineer girl," said Fejes, "I like her special the most, it's like a game within a game. Her special is she can pull an enemy in towards her and then direct them where you want to punch them. So if you're skilled enough, you can take our enemies in the air, or direct them into a group and create a bowling ball like effect."

Fejes said that you'll have to use each character to uncover all the hidden areas and access different routes. If you're playing as just one character, you won't see everything. He also hinted at the desire to add new characters down the line, but wants to focus on getting the game done first.

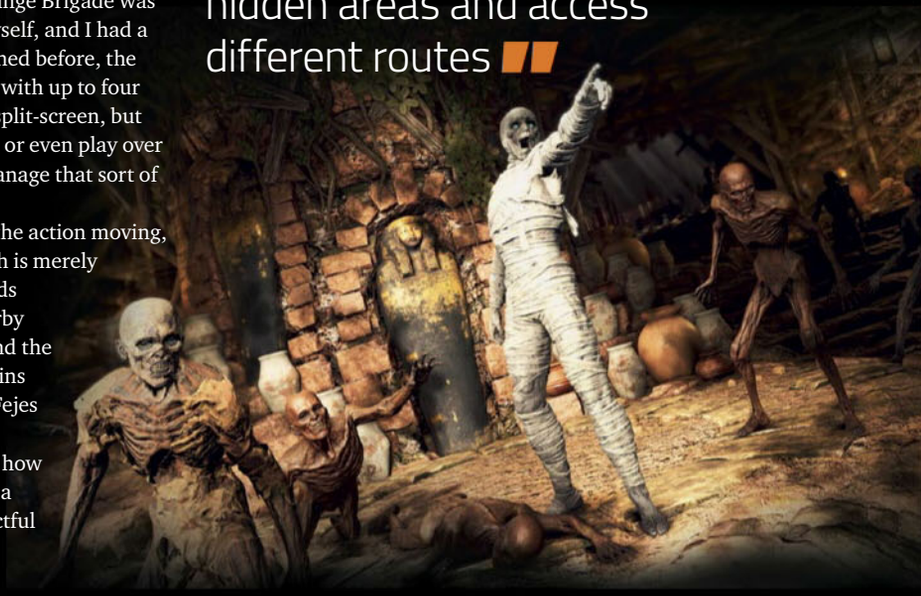
My time with Strange Brigade was spent entirely by myself, and I had a blast, but as mentioned before, the game can be played with up to four players. There's no split-screen, but you can play online, or even play over a LAN, if you can manage that sort of setup.

In order to keep the action moving, the penalty for death is merely waiting a few seconds to respawn in a nearby unearthed coffin, and the loss of some gold coins used for upgrades. Fejes said the team is still working out exactly how to penalise death in a way that feels impactful but not too harsh.

Speaking of death, each map comes riddled with deadly traps for you to lure enemies into, or become a victim of yourself. I can't tell you how satisfying it was watching a horde of undead bastards meet their doom in a giant spinning blade trap.

When my session was over I can honestly say I wanted to play more. I went into Strange Brigade knowing basically nothing about it, and walked out ready to prepare myself for some late nights when it releases. *ANDREW WHITEHEAD* PC

> "you'll have to use each character to uncover all the hidden areas and access different routes"

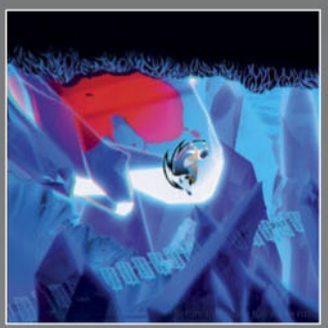


The four playable characters have different loadouts and unique specials.

The charge of the setting the undead alight brigade.

Games 265

YOUR GUIDE TO PC GAMES



Open world dreaming

The world is better for these games

It feels like everyone I know has fallen deeply, madly in love with Dream Daddy - the Daddy Dating Simulator. This is a game I can easily admit that I am very unlikely to play, but that I am endlessly glad exists.

For one thing, I love seeing the game's screenshots pop up in my various social feeds, from the various player character dads that people are creating - who are all cute as a button - but also the game itself. The characters, the art style, it's just a lovely change from PUBG videos - not that there's anything wrong with PUBG videos, by the way!.

But I also just love hearing these wonderfully down to earth, but marvelously queer tales of virtual romance, and about the complex interactions in the game. It's just... delightful.

I feel much the same way about Yonder, a game that seems all whimsical exploration with nary an ounce of combat in it open world adventures. Again, it's a game I'm probably not going to play, but theres' a real joy in seeing the expansive screenshots some of my friends are sharing.

This is what's so great about the growing diversity of games - there really is something for everyone, and I just love seeing people get excited.

David Hollingworth
Digital Editor

Contents

51 Pyre
54 Fictorum
56 Yonder
58 Aven Colony
60 Serial Cleaner
62 Sundered
64 Behold the Kickmen
68 The Low Road
69 Gigantic
70 The Awkward Steve Duology
71 Dream Daddy

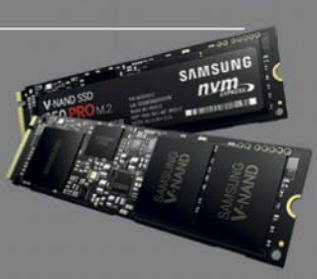
POWERED BY
REPUBLIC OF GAMERS

SCORING SYSTEM | PCPP scores its games on a 1 to 10 scale. The higher, the better – though 10 is by no means a "perfect" game. We're not convinced such a thing exists, so consider a 10 a masterpiece of PC gaming, despite its inevitable flaws. A 5 is a decidedly average game; one that doesn't excel in any particular area, without being an affront to our senses – the ultimate in mediocrity. Below this, you'll start to find the games our reviewers suffered an aneurysm getting through; above it, the titles truly worth your time and money. And remember: a score is only a vague indication of quality. Always read the full review for the definitive opinion!

WE PLAY ON:

ALIENWARE
GAME VICTORIOUS

SAMSUNG
950 PRO

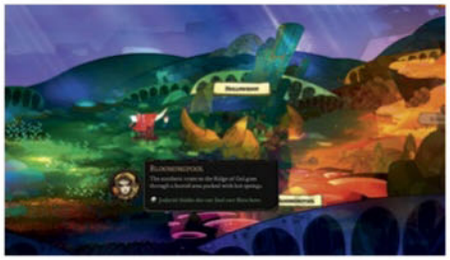


Ralph Bakshi would probably hate the guys at Supergiant Games

Pyre

We didn't start the fire

DEVELOPER SUPERGIANT GAMES
PUBLISHER SUPERGIANT GAMES
PRICE $19.99
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
www.supergiantgames.com/games/pyre



WILKS: I loved both previous Supergiant titles. Both Bastion and Transistor took an interesting approach to the action and turn-based RPG, with an unreliable narrator hiding key information from the player to change how events were perceived. They also looked and sounded fantastic. Although it's quite unlike anything that Supergiant has done before, Pyre is instantly recognisable as a Supergiant game. The character design and background art is stunning, and the interplay of soundtrack and storytelling is typical of the developer's approach. What isn't typical is the fact that the game veers rather wildly from the fairly straightforward RPG trappings of the earlier games. Pyre has all the emotion of the previous games, but these emotions are woven around a fantasy version of three-on-three basketball.

FORDHAM: Let's be honest, tactical team-based RPGs are a dime a dozen these days, with a pedigree stretching back decades. You plonk your team on the field, yawn, wait for some power to charge up, snore, and advance on your opponent hex-by-hex, turn-by-turn.

Except with Pyre, you quickly realise this isn't turn-based at all. It is, as you say, more like a basketball game... except it isn't that either. Pyre is that truly remarkable thing in this day and age: an original gameplay concept.

That's what's so refreshing about it, for me anyway. It recaptures that early '90s feeling of having to figure out how this game even works, in a most fundamental sense. There's a whiff of Magic: The Gathering (use individual units to reduce the 'hit points' of a single object, in this case the eponymous Pyre), but the way units are 'banished' from the field only to return a few seconds later is... is that actually like anything?

WILKS: Not really, no. Pyre is essentially a new sport. I think my three-on-three basketball analogy was off. The actual game itself is something more akin to reverse netball, but instead of the person with the ball being unable to move, it's everyone else that is rooted to the spot. There is so much to unpack and enjoy about this game. Not only is the actual game, known as the Rite, a lot of fun and remarkably deep when it comes to tactics, the world itself is also fascinating and really impacted the way I reacted to playing the Rites.

You are The Reader, a faceless, voiceless exile in Downside, a vast purgatory into which The Commonwealth throws its undesirables. The only way to escape Downside is by competing in the Rites and earning enough glory to head back to the respectable world. What I love about this is that it makes the enemy an unseen threat from the past, making those you compete against in the Rites equals. Like your ragtag team of misfits, the Nightwings, they just want to get out of exile and have lives again. They're not bad, they're just in the way and the only way to achieve your dreams is to crush someone else's.

FORDHAM: For seasoned reviewers like ourselves who approach every title expecting (or perhaps just hoping for) the unexpected, Pyre isn't exactly hard to figure out from first principles. But I wonder about less, uh, analytical gamers? I have to admit - for a few seconds at the beginning of the first Rite, I thought the game was turn-based.

Can you blame me? The angle, the way the characters sit on the playing field, the slightly abstract feel to it all... my first thought it something like Heroes of Might and Magic.

But this is a good thing, for me anyway. So many games are "just another shooter", where your hands make the same old movements

and your reptilian hind-brain makes the same old decisions, no matter what the actual theme of the game is.

And like everything that teaches-as-it-goes, Pyre starts simple and layers on more concepts with each Rite. Since this is an (almost) totally new kind of game, did you think the level of complexity was correct?

WILKS: Yeah, I think they basically hit the nail on the head. They've essentially taken a very familiar concept - teams of three trying to score a goal or sink a hoop - but have switched up the mechanics to the extent that it starts as something rather arcane. The first Rite was a little odd for me. Some of the core concepts I totally got. The ball carrier not being able to do anything other than move could come from any capture the flag mode, but some of the others, like only one person on the team being able to move at any time really took a while for me to grok fully. It took longer still to get used to switching between characters so I could move them by small amounts to set up winning plays. Then you take into account the differences in speed, respawn timing, jump distance and any special abilities that you may have unlocked, and it becomes something far more intricate than a simple three-on-three sport, and there is enough of a difference to make it feel entirely new.

When you add on the fact that depending on how you interact with the characters between Rites, you can influence their stats both positively and negatively, the RPG aspects and storytelling flow seamlessly into the actual action.

FORDHAM: The game does explicitly tell you "all move as one" but the mechanics let you just move one, so I suspect a common error for first-time players will be trying to run-the-pyre with one guy and no support.

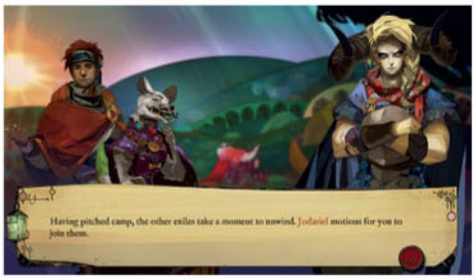
Like you say, the "fundamentals" of this game include relatively rapid swapping between characters. There does seem to be a slight advantage-bias to faster squaddies. The little dog dude, deployed properly, can scoot around a lumbering enemy and hurl himself into the pyre…

…and then of course he remains "banished" until the next point is scored, by either team. So operation slippery eel doesn't work all the time. And it won't work as effectively on certain fields - I mean, during certain rites - when various obstacles and even holes in the world limit movement. There are ways to jump and hover and such forth, and stats upgrade a unit's aura (a zone surrounding them that banishes opponents) or the amount of damage they do when they reach the Pyre.

It's also possible to hurl the ball - sorry, celestial orb - into the pyre, and not be banished, but the risks to doing this are considerable. Which is of course how the dynamic works: the basic idea (you can move, you have a protective aura that banishes other players) get progressively eroded the more you want to actually do. As you say, you need the orb to move, but this shuts down your aura. Jumping or hovering allows repositioning, but leaves the aura behind, so accidentally leaping into an enemy will result in your own banishment.

And so it goes.

But I suspect what will make this game memorable for most isn't the fantasy netball but rather the story, the journey, and the RPG elements. And I wonder if the two aspects of the game entirely gel…



Real world sportsball would be more fun if there were ghosts and firepits involved

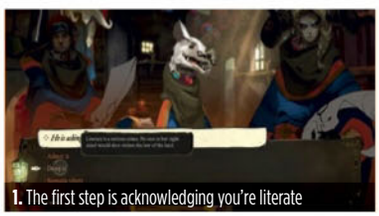
"when someone escapes you are simultaneously winning the story but weakening yourself"

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You think your ability to read is a superpower
+ Your dog has a sweet 'stache
+ Your wagon is powered by tiny demons
+ You believe any evil empire can be overcome by sportsball

SEQUENCE

READING RAINBOW

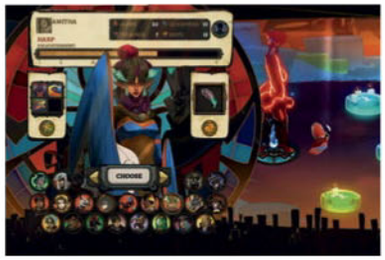

1. The first step is acknowledging you're literate

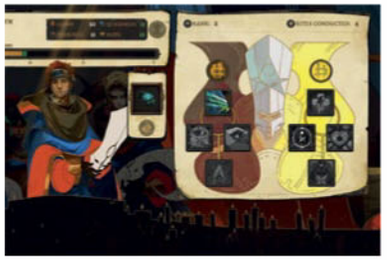
2. Take a look, it's in the book...

3. ...a chance for redemption

WILKS: I have a feeling you may think otherwise, but I think they gel really well. I love the fact that the opposing players are set up as other exiles trying to escape just like you, and that to fully engage with your team to boost your chances of escape you have to bond with them, and then when someone can escape you are simultaneously winning the story but weakening yourself in the game. I will say I'm more than a little sick of the amnesiac hero though. Your character, the Reader has no memories of how you got to Downside and has no real personality outside of the decisions you make. All of the other characters are interesting, so it's a bit of a shame the "main" character is little more than a cipher.

FORDHAM: I think it works as a mechanic to explore this kind of story - which in essence is about realising that the "party members" you'd exploit in any other RPG are actually real people and want to get out of this hellscape as much as you. So the "you won a tournament, now choose who goes free" sets a really interesting conundrum for the player.





Especially if you rely on a particular character, such as the quick little doggie dude Rukey. He makes rites easier to win, but if you use him a lot he will level up enough to qualify for "Anointment" and thus escape from the Downside.

So do you punish his loyalty by making him stay on the team? Or do you set him free? That's an interesting choice.

But when it comes to what it actually is that levels-up these characters, is three-on-three fantasy netball really the best fit? These characters are all exiled to the Downside, but then the powers-that-be threw some forbidden books and celestial orbs in after them?

Or perhaps I'm overthinking it. Perhaps the addition of a coherent RPG story to an otherwise highly original set of mechanics makes it tempting to ask questions that don't need to be asked - let alone answered.

The originality hooked me and kept me there. But the more I played, the more I wondered, would this have been even better if it was a turn-based tactics game where characters get their own weapons?

WILKS: I think you're over-thinking it, dude. When you break it down to its individual components, the idea is goofy as hell, but the way I prefer to look at it as a whole is this: the Commonwealth is a huge bureaucracy that cast you aside and you have to jump through their hoops to get back. Playing three-on-three magic reverse netball is no more ridiculous than most of the crap we have to put up with.

DANIEL WILKS and ANTHONY FORDHAM PC

SCORING HOOPS

1. The Pyre is the goal - get the celestial orb into the opponent's pyre and you deal it damage

2. Different sized characters have different characteristics. Small characters are usually the fastest

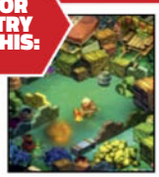
3. The blue circle is the character's aura. This works as an offensive barrier, banishing opponents carrying the orb if they come in contact with the aura

4. The Celestial Orb

5. Large characters are slow but generally have huge auras

6. Auras can be projected as a beam to banish opponents

OR TRY THIS:



BASTION
SUPERGIANT GAMES, 2011
- Kid raged a little
- Kid made me sad

TRANSISTOR
SUPERGIANT GAMES, 2014
- Cool talking sword
- Sword made me sad

THE SEXY BRUTALE
TEQUILA WORKS, 2017
- Beautiful, strange
- No sports

VERDICT:

A beautiful, melancholy, emotional fantasy sports RPG visual novel thing

WILKS: **9**
FORDHAM: **7**

Fictorum

How to get ficted

DEVELOPER SCRAPING BOTTOM GAMES
PUBLISHER SCRAPING BOTTOM GAMES
PRICE TBA
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
www.fictorum.com

Fictorum is quite an odd beast. It's an action RPG with vignettes instead of a story, a third-person shooter with loot, and a Rogue-like with explosions. It's a wizard simulator that allows you to start with huge destructive power and grow more terrifying from there. The basic plot of the game is that you play the last of a school of magic users who survived his own execution at the hands of the Inquisition, so now you're hell-bent on getting revenge on the baddies. You do this by progressing through a series of small decisions or fights in an attempt to make it through to the next area deeper within Inquisition territory. All the while the forces of the enemy start to conquer the lands, driving the player ever forward if they don't want to have to face a full army.

Although there are a number of problems with Fictorum, one thing that the developers get absolutely right is making your mage feel like an extremely powerful force of destruction right from the get go. When players begin they only have access to a single fireball spell, but thanks to destructible environments and an excellent and intuitive spell tailoring system this single spell can be used in multiple ways. The left mouse button fires the basic spell, but holding down the right button brings up a triangle with three runes at the corners. The default runes give different upgrades to the spell for an amount of extra mana expended, allowing for multi-shot, velocity or power, or any combination of the three. Need to kill a group of enemies running towards you? Multi-shot and power should take care of that, with the spell now firing off three fireballs, each with a larger, more powerful blast radius. Need to destroy a distant tower projecting an impenetrable forcefield around your escape point? Augment the spell with velocity to send it flying farther, faster and harder.

Inquisition tip: don't piss off someone who can throw fireballs bare-handed.

> "running around with powerful spells flowing from the tips of your fingers feels great"

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

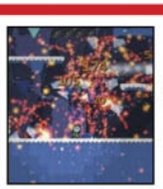
+ You believe any problem can be solved with a fireball
+ You really hate cottages
+ You think D&D wizards are far too limited

Throughout the procedurally generated mission players can gather equipment and new spells by looting buildings in towns they pass through, as rewards for completed quests or by buying them from vendors. New runes can also be found, allowing for greater customisation of spells.

Running around with powerful spells flowing from the tips of your fingers feels great, and sometimes everything comes together well, but more often than not, confused area design and some really poor enemy AI puts a real dampener on proceedings. A mission might call on the mage to protect a town against corrupted monsters, but instead of telling the player where they are or how many have to be killed you simply have to run around a large, procedurally generated area and hope that you run into a greebly. Most enemies will simply charge you en-masse allowing themselves to be easily picked off with a spell or two, but occasionally they will be able to snipe you from half a map away with spells dealing massive damage. With some patching, Fictorum has the potential to be a fun Rogue-like Red Faction with magic. As it stands it's a fun but frustrating novelty. *DANIEL WILKS* PC

OR TRY THIS:

LICHDOM: BATTLEMAGE
XAVIANT, 2014
+ Awesome spellcrafting
− Terrible everything else



MAGICMAKER
TASTY STEWDIOS LLC, 2014
+ Two million spell combinations
− 2D

IN VERBIS VERTUS
INDOMITUS GAMES, 2015
+ Fun spellcasting
− All voice commands

VERDICT:

Too uneven to be great but there are few games that have done powerful destructive magic better

7

XBOX ONE
EXPLORER'S EDITION
PS4
EXPLORER'S EDITION
EXPLORER'S EDITION
ARK
SURVIVAL EVOLVED
STEAM
MA 15+
ARK
SURVIVAL EVOLVED
GET THE
EXPLORER'S EDITION
INCLUDING
THE SCORCHED EARTH EXPANSION,
PLUS TWO MORE EXPANSION PACKS AS
THEY BECOME AVAILABLE
MA 15+
RESTRICTED
Strong themes
and violence,
Online interactivity
©2017 Wild Card. All rights reserved.
ARK
SURVIVAL EVOLVED
8TH AUGUST 2017
PRE-ORDER NOW

Yonder: The Cloud Catcher Chronicles

Into the wild blue

DEVELOPER PRIDEFUL SLOTH
PUBLISHER PRIDEFUL SLOTH
PRICE US$25
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
yonderchronicles.com

I thought Yonder would give me a sword.

My inventory comprised a hammer, an axe, a pick, a scythe, even a fishing rod. But my scabbard was empty, my sword hand flexed anxiously without a blade to wrap its fingers around.

Yonder looks like a third-person action-RPG in the vein of The Legend of Zelda or Fable or a Darksiders by way of Fisher-Price. It looks like the kind of game that has you trekking across a fantasy countryside, running quests for hapless villagers who stand around all day and night patiently waiting for you to solve their problems, and hacking and slashing whatever nefarious creatures get in your way.

So where on earth was my sword? Turns out Yonder isn't really that kind of game.

What might be used as weapons in another action-RPG are all granted more mundane utility here. The hammer is used to break boulders down into chunks of stone and to smash crates in order to collect the materials within. The axe is used to chop down trees, turning them into bits of wood. The pick allows you to mine various types of ore from the sliver-like veins found running across rocky surfaces. The scythe cuts through long grass. The fishing rod, uh… actually does kill fish, though this shouldn't suggest that there are in fact nefarious creatures dwelling underwater.

Yonder is instead a game almost entirely about crafting.

But first it begins with a shipwreck. You wake up in a cave on an island, your crew seemingly vanished. After encountering a fairylike creature you embark on a quest to save the land of Gemea from the "evil murk" that has infested its eight environmentally distinct regions. The local Gemeans greet you as their saviour and are all-too-willing to give you tips on how to beat back the murk as long as you run some errands for them first.

The source of the Evil Murk. Quick, knit something to stop it!

> "unlock new crafting recipes which allow you to deliver more items to the demanding villagers"

There's Theodore over in Goldlake who wants you to catch him a nackle fish. There's Marina who needs you to deliver her enough stone so she can reopen the East Docks. There's Hugh in Fairmont who teaches you how to make a bundle of sticks by combining three sticks and some vine. Teagin Gabardine, the master tailor, will help you craft some new sails for your ship if you can just bring back some giant moth silk. And then there's Lion-Maned Jess who'll show you how to craft a buttaberry blower and lace fish into a haberdashery, which in turn you combine with a tailor's kit (made from twine and wood), some silk, cloth and dye to make yourself a brand new basic tunic. Phew.

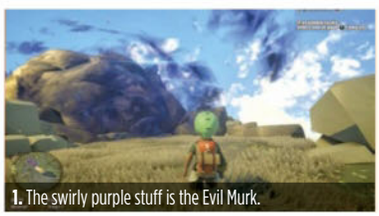
Early on you'll inherit a farm near the village of Fairmont. You can upgrade it with animal pens in which you'll house various creatures you've befriended out in the wilds. I lured a groffle there with the promise of celium seeds and it repaid such kindness with a continuous supply of groffle milk that I could use to trade for other items and, uh… groffle poop that I had to scoop up every time I revisited my farmstead.

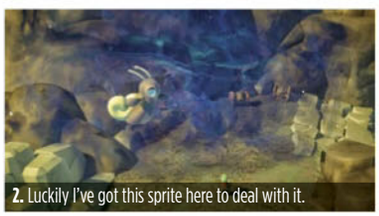
WHY SHOULD I CARE?

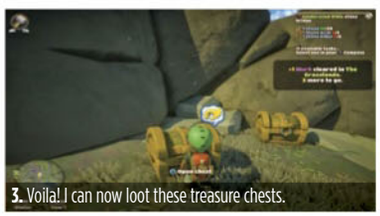
+ You've always dreamed of running a farm
+ You live for running errands
+ You don't care for swords

SEQUENCE

CLEAN UP GEMEA


1. The swirly purple stuff is the Evil Murk.


2. Luckily I've got this sprite here to deal with it.


3. Voila! I can now loot these treasure chests.

Every quest tends to involve travelling to a remote location, fetching something for someone, crafting something for someone, or travelling somewhere to fetch something then using it to craft something for someone. You'll join various guilds in your travels, each of which specialises in a specific crafting profession - from carpentry to tailoring via cooking, tinkering and brewing. As you progress through the guilds, you'll unlock new crafting recipes which, in turn, allow you to deliver more complex items to the demanding villagers.

Pushing you through all this crafting and collecting is the ever-present murk. It acts like a gating mechanism: collect enough sprites hidden in the world and you can clear the murk and restore life to Gemea. It's a simple progression system, but it works well to keep you eager to poke around looking for more sprites and more murky areas.

Yonder isn't challenging in an action game sense. Instead what it demands from you is the ability to read a map in order to navigate its world while also remembering where to find its dozens upon dozens of crafting materials. Part of this is due to the map only showing a quest's final destination and not the route you need to take. You'll know, for example, that you need to get to that village in the middle of a mountain, but you'll spend a considerable amount of time exploring the area until you find the path that actually takes you there. If you expect thorough waypoints you'll likely feel frustrated here. But if you do enjoy mapping a location in your mind and learning the best routes to take as you backtrack across the land, there's a lot you'll find to be satisfying.

It could do with some more polish in its presentation, especially in the way it delivers its story. When you talk to an NPC the camera auto-centres on their face but doesn't take into account nearby objects. As a result, I've had more than one conversation with, for example, a fence instead of the person standing next to the fence. Also, quests can often start and end with little fanfare, either failing to convey why you now need to collect five eggs or forgetting to let you know what you received in return for handing over those five eggs.

It'll be interesting to see what the developers add to Yonder over the coming months. Updates that add some polish and more crafting recipes would be welcome. What I hope they don't do is add a sword. You really don't need one. *DAVID WILDGOOSE* PC

POOP FARM

1. Your currently held gear. Go on, axe me what I'm holding.

2. Seasons change and there's a day/night cycle.

3. Dress up in silly costumes. I even made this backpack.

4. Groffle poop. Gotta clean it up.

5. My farmstead. Use the nearby chest as storage.

6. This groffle looks happy enough despite my 0% rating.

OR TRY THIS:

STARDEW VALLEY
CONCERNED APE, 2016
- Farm life
- Relationship troubles

PORTAL KNIGHTS
KEEN GAMES, 2017
- Cute as hell
- Hack and slash

SIM FARM
MAXIS, 1993
- You'll learn something
- It's actually really boring

VERDICT:

A chilled action-RPG that ditches combat for crafting and exploration.

7

Aven Colony

Aven calling... is anyone home?

DEVELOPER MOTHERSHIP ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER TEAM17
PRICE $29.99
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
avencolony.com

Developers of city management sims have to make a choice. Either create a super-complex ultra-detailed capital-S simulation of a settlement - which will become a cult-favourite among a relatively small group of gamers - or create something more basic and accessible, in hopes of reaching a wider audience.

Now, I'd argue that by setting the game on distant worlds and wrapping it in a traditional sci-fi story, Aven Colony has already jammed itself into a niche. So making the actual game with, shall we say, app-level complexity may not have been developer Mothership's best decision...

...until you realise this is a multi-platform release, also available on Xbox and PlayStation. And that explains everything.

Because this game has to play on a TV, there are no screens full of hundreds of tiny icons and labels. There's limited granularity - colonies can enact various "policies" (like rationing, martial law etc), but individual colonists are entirely AI-controlled.

Aven also has an odd pace. It's a pausable, real-time simulation, and it's possible to accelerate time, but the game-world experiences one full year every few minutes. As the colony grows, the pace of the player's clicking accelerates as constant crises, large and small, internal and exeternal, crop up.

About a third of each year is the planet's brutal winter, where solar power plants produce less electricity, and farms produce less food. This means injudicious building during summer can leave the colony without adequate power through winter.

Space: the final frontier in shopping mall technology.

> it's basic for a sim, but if all you have is an hour or so, it scratches that city-building itch

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You're a delegator, not a micromanager
+ You love a good, solid tunnel
+ Alien spores are an opportunity, not a crisis
+ You also agree retail shopping is #1, always

This is one of the primary strategic considerations during colony design.

The other, strangely dominant, consideration is the connection of buildings via tunnels. The game-world is a grid, and buildings can be placed flush against each other, but colonists (perhaps understandably) don't like having to walk through a geothermal power plant to get to their greenhouse job, or to a retail centre.

A smart manager will position buildings one square apart, and fill the gap with a tunnel. Colonists prefer to travel in tunnels, and an adequate tunnel network will prevent "commute penalties" sapping colony morale.

Of the various resource levels - water, food, power, air quality, crime, entertainment, commute - it's morale that can end a game with the most capricious speed.

Seemingly at random, the colonial governor (ie the player) must survive a referendum. Morale translates directly to votes. Keep morale above 50%, and the game continues. Drop below, and it's scenario over.

In some ways, Aven is more of a tactical colony management sim, rather than strategic. There's little scope for working toward a grand plan. Each map of the campaign (the same maps are used for sandbox mode) is relatively cramped and has various geographical features that limit expansion - giant tunnels, rocky spires, lakes, weird alien crystals and such.

SEQUENCE

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

1. An Immigration Hub brings new colonists from the mothership, ie more workers, and allows expansion.

2. The Trade Hub lets the player select resource exchange deals... which are mostly not worth it.

3. Building structures too early puts pressure on a young colony. Unemployment and cramped housing kill morale.

After playing a few maps, it becomes clear that each scenario is laid out to encourage colony growth in certain directions. Geothermal vents provide much more power than solar panels, so tunnel networks snake toward the vents. An alien crystal called Zorium can be mined to provide enormous amounts of power, so once all the vents are covered with geothermal generators, the next phase sees expansion head toward Zorium deposits. Along the way, various lumps of ore provide sites for metal extraction. Metal is converted into "nanites", which are both the game's currency and raw building material.

The other element that limits expansion is the range of constructor drones. These drones live in specialised structures, and fly out to build or repair buildings on command.

The necessity of a drone network puts the brakes on the speed of colony expansion. But the process basically goes: extend tunnels, build drone hub, build mines and power plants, build accommodation so workers don't have to walk far to get to jobs in the power plants and mines, then build air conditioning systems, then build farms to provide food, then build entertainment complexes, then build increasing numbers of solar panels to boost power output for all this new stuff.

There are existential threats, of course, including "shard storms", lightning storms, and weird alien spores that infest buildings and spread "the creep".

All of these can be summarily dealt with via defensive structures such as lightning towers, plasma cannons, and "scrubber drones" which remove the creep.

There seems to be a bit of a problem with the way these external threats affect the colonists. In that they don't seem to, at all. Sure, each threat will break buildings, and the lack of power or food will impact morale, but you can be desperately building plasma cannons to fend off an incoming shard storm, only to get an alert from your political advisor pointing out that the colonists want better shopping options.

Aven Colony will not be difficult, for the right kind of gamer. For the player who intuits how all the different resources interact, victory is a simple matter of slowly and methodically building up the colony piece-by-piece. Don't build advanced structures until the power network is solid and there's plenty of nanites coming in. Ignore tier 1 structures and wait until there are enough nanites to build straight to tier 2. Once there's lots of income, get into the habit of building something, surrounding it with tunnels, then building a tier 3 solar power plant.

And yet... there's something almost meditative about how Aven Colony plays. Yes, it's basic for a sim, but if all you have is an hour or so, it scratches that city-building itch. There's no scope for grand design, and it's rare for the player to get into a situation where a plan is thrown completely off the rails by an unforseen event. But there's still satisfaction to be had in keeping these ungrateful, retail-therapy-obsessed colonists happy.

Aven Colony is not destined to be a classic of the genre. But it looks good thanks to Unreal 4, and if Anno 2070 just seems like too much work, this city-builder-lite will keep you distracted.

ANTHONY FORDHAM PC

COLONIAL RULE

1. The red structures are all the things the colony can't afford.

2. Click a structure to open this window and do... stuff.

3. Pause time, or accelerated to 8x.

4. Overlays show air quality, food production, housing etc.

5. Missions consist of "build three farms" or "trade 100 corn"

6. Finding buildings is tricky. Which of these is a Tier 2 storage bay?

7. On this map, green space is at a premium. Reserve for farms and water pumps.

OR TRY THIS:

ANNO 2205
2015, BLUE BYTE
- Epic battles on the moon!
- Simplified gamplay by series standards

ANNO 2070
2011, BLUE BYTE
- Definitive hardcore future-city-builder
- Requires Uplay

CITIES: SKYLINES
2015, COLOSSAL
- Eclipses SimCity as THE city-builder
- It's... very Euro

VERDICT:

Tactical city-sim for the sub-menu-phobic.

6

Serial Cleaner

You've got a corpse in a car - minus a head

DEVELOPER IFUN4ALL
PUBLISHER CURVE DIGITAL
PRICE US$15
AVAILABLE AT STEAM, GOG
ifun4all.com

So you've just beaten a level in Hotline Miami. Good job. But, hang on a second. There's a dead body sprawled on the floor in every room. Murder weapons abandoned where they fell after use. Blood just everywhere. Someone's gonna have to clean this all up before the cops arrive. Huh, looks like that someone is you.

Serial Cleaner takes this premise and adapts it into a fast and fluid stealth game. You play the titular cleaner sent into a series of increasingly gruesome crime scenes to clean up the mess. In each level you have to dispose of the corpses and murder weapons, mop up the blood (typically a certain percentage of the total spatter), and pocket any trophies you'd like to display on your bedroom shelf.

Serial Cleaner also seems to misunderstand its premise. You know the bit in Pulp Fiction where Harvey Keitel is called in to help "clean up" the situation after Vincent shoots Marvin in the car? They get the cleaner in to ensure no one suspects a crime has been committed. Here, by the time you arrive at a crime scene it's already crawling with cops. You have to run around the level, grabbing bodies and whatnot while staying out of the vision cones of the patrolling police. It's weird and doesn't make a lick of sense, but I guess at the same time it has to be this way for the stealth gameplay to function.

Levels are small, generally no more than two screens high and wide, and take place in office spaces, warehouses, trailer parks and other down and out locales. You're able to hold down a button and zoom out to see the entire level and plan your approach. This doesn't pause the game, mind you, so you've still gotta think quickly. Maybe you'll wait for that cop to walk past the window then you can duck through the door, hide in the closet for few seconds, head out the back, quickly move that pallet crate, grab the body and you're… Shit! They spotted me. Restart.

Despite being a stealth game, it's fast. You move quickly, make mistakes and quickly jump back into the level, just like Hotline Miami. Bodies and items are semi-randomly respawned each time you restart so, while you can learn police patrol routes, you've still got to improvise to a certain extent. I just wish there was more variety. If you get spotted you do have a few seconds grace to find a hiding spot before you're caught. But it's annoying when an off-screen cop suddenly turns around and sees you, giving you almost no time to react. Still, it's really satisfying to clear a level, disposing of everything without being spotted even once.

Between levels there's an attempt at a story where you're living with your mum who's seemingly oblivious to your chosen career, and the two of you chat about bills and watch TV together while an ominous cloud drifts by. It's odd and had me playing through all 20 levels with a degree of curiosity I'm not sure the fairly simplistic gameplay would've matched. *DAVID WILDGOOSE* PC

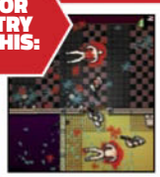
Miss Scarlett in the kitchen, the study, the drawing room and the whole house.

> "if you get spotted you have a few seconds grace to find a hiding spot before you're caught"

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

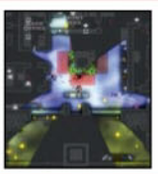
+ You have a car that can hold three bodies in the boot
+ You can't tell your mum what you do for work
+ You are Mr Sheen

OR TRY THIS:



HOTLINE MIAMI
DENNATON, 2012
+ Drips with style
- That you don't clean up

VISCERA CLEANUP DETAIL
RUNESTORM, 2015
+ Pick up those gibs
- Mop physics

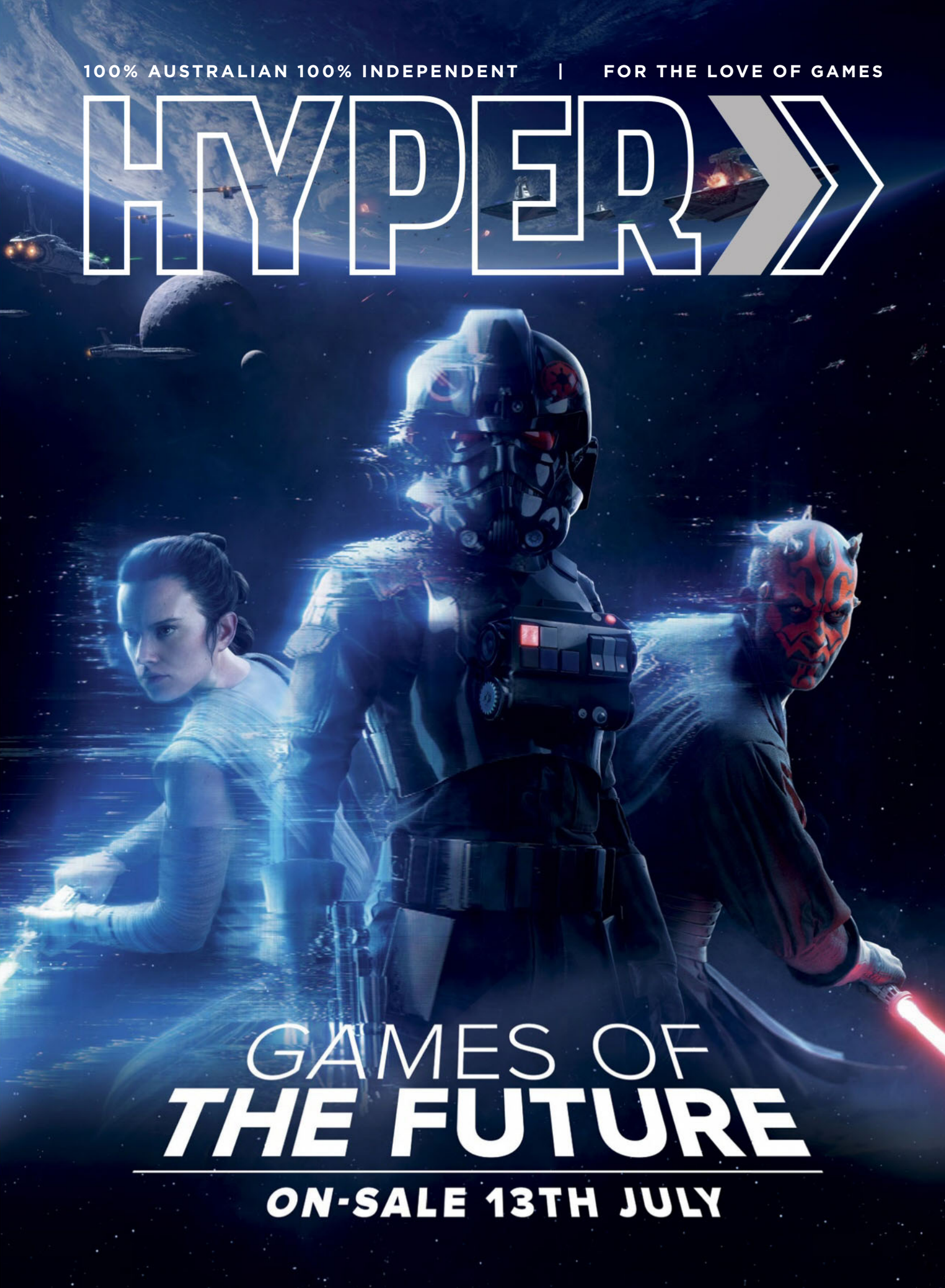


MONACO
POCKETWATCH, 2013
+ Top-down crime caper
- Co-op only

VERDICT:

A slick and stylish stealth-action game that could do with some greater depth.

6


100% AUSTRALIAN 100% INDEPENDENT | FOR THE LOVE OF GAMES
HYPER
GAMES OF
THE FUTURE
ON-SALE 13TH JULY

Sundered

Cruel Beauty

DEVELOPER THUNDER LOTUS GAMES
PUBLISHER THUNDER LOTUS GAMES
PRICE $17.99
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
thunderlotusgames.com/sundered

In the early proceedings of Sundered, things are relatively placid for a Metroidvania style action platformer. After being dragged underground by a mass of tentacles you find yourself in an underground hell part research laboratory, part verdant biological disaster, part Yes album cover. You explore the underground area, learning how to use your basic abilities to navigate the map and kill the randomly spawning enemies, gathering shards to spend on unlocking new and more powerful abilities in the central hub. It's simple, straightforward and the hand-drawn animation is staggeringly pretty. Then, early in proceedings one small event shows just how ape crazy bonkers the game can be, but also highlights one of the major problems with the game.

While there is no real set mission structure in Sundered, like with all Metroidvania games, the order of the day is to complete tasks to unlock new areas that will reward the player with abilities that will give them access to new areas in which to do the same thing. It's a tried and true formula that works very well. When Eshe, the near silent protagonist of Sundered enters the first of three areas, much of it is closed off by mechanical doors. Some of these doors can be opened by smashing a control orb near them, while others don't have enough power to open at all. Finding that power is obviously one of the first priorities. In one of the pre-rendered rooms on the map there is a device that will turn the power back on but it will also activate the defensive systems of the facility. Doors unlock but an alarm sounds and scores of enemies, including laser firing battle droids swarm to the area. Survive the initial onslaught and the power stays on opening up new areas to explore. Die and you'll be sent back to the central hub where you can spend your collected shards on upgrades health, shields, damage and armour, so you can be a little more powerful when you next attempt to turn the power back on.

Not punishing death isn't a bad thing, but going back to the central hub every time you die isn't particularly fun thanks to the Rogue-like randomly generated areas between the pre-rendered rooms. There is little about these areas that is memorable and having to find a new path to an objective each time gets rather grating. What could have made the backtracking that is a core component of Metroidvania style games more nuanced and interesting instead adds to frustration. The corridors between set rooms aren't memorable to begin with and the fact that they change after death just exacerbates that problem. The developers want you to die. That's a central concept of the game but having to rediscover a path to your objective each time adds little to the Metroidvania formula aside from a time sink. The randomly spawning enemies don't do a great deal to improve proceedings, as there isn't as much nuance in the combat. The fact that some beasties can attack you from multiple screens away adds to the annoyance. Melee attacks have a few

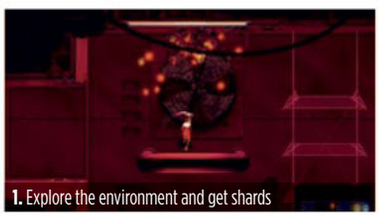
> having to rediscover a path to your objective each time adds little aside from a time sink

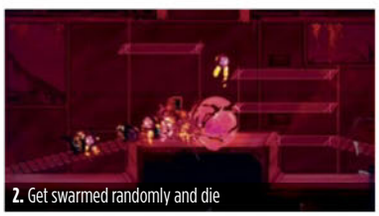
WHY SHOULD I CARE?

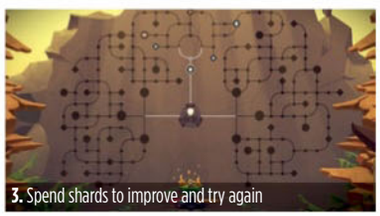
+ You believe in the legacy of Jordan Mechner
+ You believe character should be seen, not heard
+ You want to kill the same monster a billion times
+ You don't want to have to bother memorising routes

SEQUENCE

RINSE REPEAT


1. Explore the environment and get shards


2. Get swarmed randomly and die


3. Spend shards to improve and try again

combos and an unlockable cannon and dash round out the arsenal. Rather than every encounter being a thrill, more often than not they become little more than a roadblock and an excuse to farm for some more shards.

One thing the game gets absolutely right is the epic scale boss battles. These creatures are all far bigger than Eshe and are a pleasure to fight, though it's not necessarily a pleasure to have to run back to a boss room on death through yet another iteration of procedurally generated corridors. Upon death, bosses drop special shards that can either be spent to give Eshe a leg up in the game at the cost of a harder ending, or saved up for a harder game with an easier ending. The greatness of the bosses doesn't really spread to regular enemies. While they are interesting when they first appear, the swarming nature of monsters quickly makes them feel very similar when it comes to fighting them.

By the time you are making your way through the third act, things really come together and Sundered starts to feel genuinely satisfying. All Eshe's movement skills are unlocked and the silent heroine can rocket around areas with anti-gravity boots, a grapple, double-jumps, dashes and the like. The options for movement makes traversing the procedural areas more interesting and helps to enliven the combat, but by that stage you will already have slogged through many hours of frustrating backtracking and grinding combat. Sundered isn't a bad game by any measure, but it looks like more time and effort went into the absolutely gorgeous hand-drawn animations and pre-rendered backgrounds than went into making sure that the whole game was a satisfying mix of combat and exploration. The game gets there by the end, but for many, it could be too little too late. *TAVISH FORREST* PC

ORB ANATOMY

1. Yellow is power, used for dodging and other special abilities

2. Red us health, blue is a recharging shield and the two red tabs are health potions

3. The first boss is by far the easiest but when it spawns a tonne of minions things can get dicey

4. Eshe, our heroine.

5. That says Meteoroid, not Metroid, honestly

6. The grey areas of the map are unexplored areas

OR TRY THIS:

SALT AND SANCTUARY
SKA STUDIOS, 2016
- + Hand-drawn MetroidvaniaSouls
- − Punishing

HOLLOW KNIGHT
TEAM CHERRY, 2017
- + Adorable hand-drawn bugs
- − Adorably difficult

ROGUE LEGACY
CELLAR DOOR GAMES, 2013
- + Meaningful death and progress
- − Irritable Bowels

VERDICT:

Beautiful but flawed, Sundered is too frustrating early on to be fully satisfying.

6

Behold the Kickmen

Do you have what it takes to be the best at the football?

DEVELOPER SIZE FIVE GAMES
PUBLISHER SIZE FIVE GAMES
PRICE US$4
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
sizefivegames.com

Can a videogame be a comedy sketch? UK duo Size Five Games thinks so, and its growing oeuvre reads (or plays) more and more like the gaming equivalent of an old-school BBC sketch comedy show. The latest addition is this: a comedy 'football' (i.e. soccer) game, which claims on its splash screen that its developer knows nothing about "the football" and made no attempt to recreate the sport accurately. The game instead focuses on the basics of kicking, passing, tackling… and aftertouch? "It's only Football," the game says. "How hard can it be?"`

The eponymous Kickmen do battle on an unexpectedly circular football pitch, and goalies - sorry, "goldkeepers" - are entirely AI-controlled. This is ball-sports at its leanest. You can't select which Kickman you control, control just snaps to the next team member, often capriciously. Controlling the ball imposes a running-speed penalty, allowing other Kickmen to tackle. When a team member is within range, a line connects them to the player with the ball. Passing is as simple as tapping a button. Holding and releasing the same button does a Big Kick, where more power means less accuracy.

Like real Football, the aim is to "do a goal". The Offside Rule can come into effect at any time, where half the field becomes "offside" and you need to race to the on-side to avoid a penalty. Tackling a player without the ball also imposes a penalty. Aftertouch means using the left-right controls to curve the ball after it's been kicked - a feature real-life soccer players would probably love. And Dash allows a dribbling player to scoot left or right and become temporarily immune to tackling - but they must lose and regain control of the ball before they can use Dash again.

Our favourite Kickmen feature is its promise to include "Both Off Sides!"

> "superior chaining of abilities and tricks sees the fans almost literally hurl money at your team"

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You think soccer needs to be taken less seriously
+ You enjoy being greeted with a kick in the shins
+ You need to know the truth of your father's mangled corpse
+ You agree that soccer pitches should be circular.

And so, these simple mechanics combine with elegant animations and a surprisingly deft sense of kinetics to produce… a genuinely fun little soccer(ish) game. Sure, it's more Foosball than FIFA, but the speed of the players and the ball, and the way it bounces crazily off objects, and the speed of a Big Kick, all just work.

On top of all this foolishness is an even more foolish career mode. A rookie Kickman must lead his team from the bottom of the ladder to win the World Cup, all the while suffering the taunts of the evil Brazilian elite Kickman, Pedro Brutus. Insinuations about your father's mangled corpse won't be enough to kill your dream of becoming the world's greatest Kickman… and superior chaining of abilities and tricks sees the fans almost literally hurl money at your team.

Okay, so it's a comedy game about how people take soccer too seriously. You won't be investing 100 hours in this thing. But for less than five bucks, Behold the Kickmen represents genuine value for money.

And thanks to clever programming and a good eye for what makes a soccer *video game* work, Size Five has, perhaps unwittingly, created a surprisingly good-hearted, and playable, parody of The Wonderful Game (sic). *ANTHONY FORDHAM* PC

OR TRY THIS:

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005
2004, SEGA
+ Banned in China because it mentions Tibet
− Otherwise basically a joke

SPEEDBALL (SERIES)
1988-2011, BITMAP BROS (AND OTHERS)
+ Violet cyberpunk ice hand-hockey!
− No good versions this millennium

BLOOD BOWL 2
2015, CYANIDE
+ Best PC version yet
− Still very 'boardgamey'

VERDICT:

Solid gameplay helps you stick around for more soccer jokes.

8

Huge Power, Tiny Package

CHRONOS
BY ORIGIN PC

"Origin's Chronos Gaming PC, without a doubt, tops our charts in regards to performance and takes the crown even at half the size as the other contenders."

Steven Bassiri, TweakTown Editor

Configure Yours Online today - originpc.com.au

TEAM ORIGIN PC

intel inside CORE i7

NVIDIA GEFORCE GTX

VR READY

DVD Contents

Everybody needs a bit of security. That's why you'll find a full install for ESET Internet Security on this month's disk as well as a special link to get you a free year's subscription to the service. If there is anyone who has a Mac we have you covered too with a copy of Cybersecurity Pro 9. Ah, who are we kidding - nobody actually has a Mac to play games on. That's madness.

As always, if you have any suggestions for what you would like to see on the disk, you can send an email to letters@pcpowerplay.com.au or you can post in the DVD feedback thread on our official forums that can be found at www.pcpowerplay.com.au. Have fun and we'll see you next month.

The PCPP Team.

25 FREE GAMES, DEMOS & UTILS!

- 1982
- Art of War: Red Tides
- Awesomenauts
- Bitardia Cards: Memes of 2ch
- Chasing Styx
- Cybersecurity Pro 9 for Mac
- Embers of Mirrim Demo
- ENIGMA: Demo
- Formicide
- Full version of Eset Internet Security (32 bit)
- Full version of Eset Internet Security (64 bit)
- Gorescript Demo
- HEVN Demo
- Kira
- Lil Tanks Demo
- MAKE IT as an Artist

Art of War: Red Tides

- Mausoleum of the Medusa
- MSI Electric City
- Realm Grinder
- RPG MO
- Shattered God DEMO
- SYMMETRY alpha
- The Crown of Leaves Demo
- TinkerQuarry
- Treehouse Basketball
- VRIQ

Awesomenauts

Installation instructions included on the disc. Browse the disc and launch **index.html** for more.

USING THE DVDS
PC PowerPlay DVDs are suitable for use in almost any computer but the software contained on the medium is for Windows operating systems only. Because each PC is different, PC PowerPlay and Next Media cannot guarantee the DVDs will operate as expected on every system, despite strict adherence to Windows compatibility.

LOADING
The DVDs are set to autostart. On insertion it will load the DVD's Terms and Conditions of Use disclaimer in your default Web browser. If the DVD failed to autostart, you can load the menu manually by running the file called start.htm in the root directory using Windows Explorer.

VIRUSES
These DVDs are rigorously checked for viruses during production, however, PC PowerPlay can make no guarantees to this end. Next Media always recommends that the DVDs be scanned using your own anti-virus software on first and subsequent uses.

INSTALLING SOFTWARE
Simply click the install/download link under a file's description to launch the installation program. please ensure that all other programs are closed and that any anti-virus software is disabled before performing a software installation. Due to STEAM region locking, not all content may be available toutside Australia.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT
PC PowerPlay assumes the end-user of these DVDs has the necessary computer knowledge required to operate and install software from this product, and cannot provide technical support either for this or for any of the software contained on this disc.

DVD REPLACEMENTS
PC PowerPlay can only replace DVDs that were damaged or faulty at the time of purchase. If you think a DVD fits into one of these categories then please contact the DVD Producer immediately to assess whether a replacement needs to be sent out. email: dwilks@nextmedia.com.au

© nextmedia

PC & TECH AUTHORITY

AUSTRALIA'S MOST POPULAR PC MAG

X299 MOTHERBOARDS TESTED

+ BENCHING THE 10-THREAD 20-CORE I9 7900X

SHOOTOUT: MID-RANGE CPUS

15 SATA and M2 TESTED

SUPER SPEED SSDs

TRANSFORM YOUR PC FROM SLOUCH TO SUPERCHARGED!

- BUYER'S GUIDE
- BUDGET AND PREMIUM
- HOW TO INSTALL WINDOWS

FREE DVD

FULL VERSIONS!

APPS WORTH $148

- ESET INTERNET SECURITY
- ASHAMPOO PHOTO MAILER
- PDF COMPRESSOR
- WEBSITE X5 START 13

LABS REVIEWS:

+ SURFACE LAPTOP
+ IPAD PRO
+ DELL XPS 15
+ ONEPLUS 5
+ OPPO R11
+ HP ELITEBOOK 360
+ GIGABYTE SABRE 17
+ SEAGATE IRONWOLF PRO

AND MORE!

TOP TRAVELLER TIPS

GOOGLE MAPS

ANTIVIRUS SOFTWARE

DOES IT DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

AU$9.99 Inc. GST
NZ$10.99 Inc. GST

09 771329 297006

ISSUE 238 SEPTEMBER 2017

ON SALE NOW

The Low Road

Spy Hillman Hunter

DEVELOPER XGEN STUDIOS
PUBLISHER XGEN STUDIOS
PRICE US$20
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
www.thelowroad.com

My partner didn't trust me and I didn't trust him. So of course in a game called The Low Road I had no option but to blackmail him into co-operating with me. You can stuff your ethics and consciences and enjoy the view from the high road. I'll be down here getting the job done.

The moral vacuum described here is the 1970s American automobile industry and, in particular, the parallel industry of corporate espionage fuelled by it. Initially, you play as Noomi Kovacs, a young intelligence graduate starting her first spy job. She's itching to get out from behind her desk and into what she imagines is the thrilling, dangerous world of field work. But her boss, known as Turn, doesn't think she's ready. Anyway, these days - this is now the '70s remember? - most spy work can be done over the phone.

I liked the first puzzle of this stylish, sometimes silly, always sardonic, point-and-click adventure. Turn gives Noomi a case file and a phone number. You've got to read the file (don't worry, there's only a handful of documents within) and use the information you've gleaned to extract the necessary answers from the person you've called. I liked it because it made me feel clever. I didn't feel like a spy exactly, but I did get a genuine sense I was identifying clues and piecing a puzzle together. It didn't feel rote.

The Low Road gets a lot right with its puzzles. Sometimes it's about using the right object you've collected in the right place. Sometimes it's about getting the right information from someone and then using it to get more information out of someone else. Some puzzles present you with a single screen activity, such as pickpocketing an ID card by guiding it through a maze of pockets without alerting its owner. Most puzzles are standalone, but a few require you to recall things that happened earlier in the game in funny and unexpected ways. It's always satisfying when you make those connections.

Noomi's office has all the mod cons, like this room-size photocopier.

> this isn't a sombre look at corporate espionage; it's goofy, sarcastic and frequently absurd

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You've always wanted to play a game set in the '70s car industry
+ You're sad they never made another NOLF
+ The high road is not an option

Also unexpected, to me at least, is the sense of humour. This isn't a somber or gritty look at corporate espionage; it's goofy, sarcastic and frequently absurd. When Noomi needs a four-digit passcode to enter a secure door, clicking on the panel prompts her to try 0001. Clicking again has her try 0002. A third time has her try 0003. Click on a pigeon that's just minding its own business on the roof of the agency building and its feathers start to fly. Keep clicking and it'll abruptly disappear, popping like a balloon.

It's possible to fail and prematurely end the game. The first time I encountered this occurred after selecting the wrong option during a conversation. I figured it probably wasn't the smart thing to say, but I wanted to see what would happen if I did. Noomi's cover was predictably blown before an amusing coda summarised how the cast lived out the rest of their lives. Then it quickly rewound and I was back at the fateful dialogue choice.

When faced with the decision again, I didn't have to think twice. I took the low road. *DAVID WILDGOOSE* PC

OR TRY THIS:

DETROIT
IMPRESSIONS, 1994
+ Manage a car manufacturer
− Ethically

SID MEIER'S COVERT ACTION
MICROPROSE, 1990
+ Mini games
− It's all mini games

THIMBLEWEED PARK
TERRIBLE TOYBOX, 2017
+ The year's best adventure
− Not set in the '70s

VERDICT:

A wry, funny adventure with loads of '70s, uh, flare.

8

Gigantic

The bigger they come the more player base they need

DEVELOPER MOTIGA
PUBLISHER PERFECT WORLD ENTERTAINMENT
PRICE F2P
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
www.gogigantic.com

If I said one thing multiple times while getting a feel for Gigantic, it would have been, 'That is such bullshit', after charging my hero to battle, slashing wildly, unleashing a few special abilities and getting killed by someone who actually knew what they were doing.

Such is the reality of the early rounds of this free-to-play MOBA-meets-third-person-shooter, especially if you're more familiar with the latter style of game. But with a little patience and an appreciation for the balancing of your character's offensive and defensive strengths and weaknesses, I was occasionally able to thrive and replace the defeatist swearing with some victorious swearing.

While Gigantic certainly encourages a fast-paced approach to gameplay - from the moment you're sent hurtling into the arena after leaving your staging platform, to the speed at which your character can traverse the map in search of a frag - the game will not reward a run-and-gun approach. As encounters begin, you'll realise how important it is to choose your battles wisely; advancing and retreating, making the most of your specials and teammates' complementary attributes is critical.

Five players on each side are locked in a battle to capture and hold several nodes across the map. Holding nodes and disrupting enemy positions charges up your guardian, a titan-esque character that when fully charged will make its move on the enemy guardian, pinning it to the ground exposing a weak spot to the attacking team for a short period. If players deliver enough damage to successfully 'wound' the beast, the process begins again. Three wounds wins the day.

If you're going to name your game after a Pixies song let us suggest Wave of Mutilation.

> "group fights in particular can become a frustrating cluttered mess of special effects"

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You think Kaiju should be cuddlier
+ You think Pixar needed more competitive murder
+ You're not sick of the term "hero shooter" yet

It works pretty well, the sites around capture nodes prove for some tense struggles and mayhem tends to ensue at the enemy base whenever the guardian attack event is triggered. But more exciting are P2P battles between these events, being caught in a struggle of brawn and wits as you encounter another player goes well beyond a deathmatch face off, while being more visceral than a top-down arena fighter.

Of course fights are not always refined dances of death between two nemeses, and sloppy slash, mash and hope-for-the-best encounters will be numerous. Group fights in particular can become a frustrating cluttered mess of special effects, where discerning an enemy based on their small red player name will give way to wasted special attacks and anger.

Like a few other entries in the MOBA/Hero shooter genre, Gigantic looks a bit 'Saturday Disney', but it's nicely designed all the same. The character roll includes familiar tropes: a steampunk pilot, a minotaur/bull, a nutty professor, a pixie magician, a robot and so on. Archetypes they may sometimes be, the heroes are highly varied and there's enough of them to match up with the playstyle you'd like to develop, provided you'll spend the time or money to unlock heroes beyond the starting lineup.

MICHAEL JENKIN PC

OR TRY THIS:

OVERWATCH
BLIZZARD, 2016
- (+) Hero shooting with Blizzard polish
- (-) Costs actual money

PALADINS
HI-REZ STUDIOS, 2016
- (+) Free to play hero shooter
- (-) Very familiar characters

CLOUD PIRATES
ALLODS TEAM, 2017
- (+) Free to play flying ships
- (-) No characters

VERDICT:

A robust MOBA-influenced arena shooter that's deeper (and harder) than it looks.

7

The Awkward Steve Duology

The hero we need

DEVELOPER OH, A ROCK! STUDIOS
PUBLISHER OH, A ROCK! STUDIOS
PRICE $3.99
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
oharock.wordpress.com

Can videogames be art? That question has raged since the first time someone said something stupid and someone else said something hyperbolic in response. The late, Pulitzer winning film critic, Roger Ebert said they weren't and made a lot of enemies. Former senator Scott Ludlam said they were and got love. Now a strange bearded individual with crippling social anxiety enters the fray (and I'm not talking about myself). The Awkward Steve Duology, a pair of surreal and comedic micro adventure games examining the horror of having to open a door are being exhibited in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, so I guess the question or not games are art has been answered.

In the first of the two games, A Stranger Comes Calling, Steve, a dishevelled bearded man (again, not me) is sequestered in his house trying to write the great American novel when he is interrupted by the most terrifying sound one can hear while alone, a knock on the door. Players must try to quell Steve's anxiety through a combination of hiding, rabbit patting, tea drinking and pretending the outside world doesn't exist. It's a brief but funny little game, with simple decisions being made between black and white FMV sequences, and as someone who suffers from severe anxiety (this time I am talking about me), sometimes it feels all too familiar. The second game, Don't Turn Your Back on the Ocean ups the ante for Steve. His roommate is throwing a party, so Steve has locked himself in the bathroom in an attempt to avoid people, knowing full well that there is a possibility that someone will need to use the bathroom. What is a strange, bearded man to do (again, not me)? Hide, read the ingredients on a toothpaste tube, check to see if you have any messages? Maybe form a burgeoning relationship with an equally awkward person on the other side of the door.

Wilks on deadline. Yesterday.

> "maybe form a relationship with an equally awkward person on the other side of the door"

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You know the door protects you from outside
+ You hide at parties
+ You believe in Adam and Steve

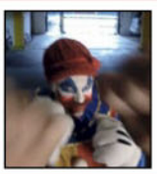
Neither game will occupy you for more than 10 or so minutes, but they are both funny and kind of touching. The silent Steve is everyone at some point in their lives when the thought of having to face the unknown but there is also a wonderful pretentiousness about the whole affair of the kind usually relegated to bad student films. It's all very deliberate and works to kind of heighten the experience of briefly clicking through the life and small struggles of a strange bearded man.

So is the Awkward Steve Duology worth 20 minutes of your time and $4 of your hard earned money? Yes. Although it is silly and funny and pretentious, it's also charming and kind and gentle. It's also a remarkably clever look at the kind of mental gymnastics people with social anxiety will often put themselves through to avoid stressful situations. So, is Awkward Steve art? Sure, why not. Give it a shot any we might see some more adventures of the bearded shut-in. If you suffer from anxiety you will probably relate. If not, you might get an appreciation of the kind of crap sufferers go through. *DANIEL WILKS* PC

OR TRY THIS:

HER STORY
SAM BARLOW, 2016
+ FMV adventure done right
− Not funny

THE INFECTIOUS MADNESS OF DOCTOR DEKKER
D'AVEKKI STUDIOS LTD, 2017
+ Lovecraftian FMV
− Typing



PRESS X NOT TO DIE
ALL SEEING EYE GAMES, 2015
+ B-Movie FMV
− Still early access

VERDICT:

Short, simple and silly, Awkward Steve is at once a joke and a hero.

8

Dream Daddy

Who let the dads out?

DEVELOPER GAME GRUMPS
PUBLISHER GAME GRUMPS
PRICE US$15
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
dreamdaddy.biz

"Build that dad!"

So I built my dad. He turns out to be a tubby, balding dude with tufts of grey around his ears and a thick salt and pepper beard. He's wearing a blue t-shirt emblazoned with two fried eggs where his man-boobs are hanging. I call him Beanton.

Beanton's just moved to Maple Bay with his teenage daughter, Amanda. In a scene-setting conversation I get to elaborate a little on the family history and decide that Beanton was once married to Amanda's mother but she passed away some years ago. Father and daughter get along well though, and they're looking forward to discovering more of Maple Bay.

We go for coffee at the local cafe. I order an Iced Teagan & Sara while Amanda opts for a Macchiato DeMarco, which will either make you chuckle in pain at the excruciatingly niche puns or scratch your head. Mat, the cafe owner, seems nice. Chilled. A little bit flirty maybe? I dunno, is it flirting when someone lets you sample his new banana bread recipe? Either way, I hope he picks up on the subtext when I tell him he should call it Right Said Banana Bread.

Back home, Joseph the next door neighbour pops over in a pink polo and blue sweater casually tied around his neck. He's brought a plate of welcome cookies. Beanton and Joseph make small talk while Amanda scoffs the cookies. I'm just clicking through dialogue boxes here. The conversation's cute and all, but I kinda wanna make some choices. I don't, and the exchange ends when Joseph invites Beanton and Amanda round for a barbecue on Saturday.

Later, Beanton and Brian went on a mini golf date together.

> where Dream Daddy does succeed is in depicting a cast of characters you'll grow to like

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You're a dad
+ You really, really, really like other dads
+ Most of all you love dad jokes

Things pick up at the park when Beanton meets Brian, also the father of a teenage girl, and the two face off in a faux-Pokemon battle where they attack each other by bragging about their daughter's accomplishments. Showing Brian that drawing of Amanda's that Beanton keeps in his wallet was super effective!

Dream Daddy is a visual novel. You click through dialogue boxes and the odd internal monologue from your avatar daddy. Occasionally, and it must be stressed just how very occasionally, you get to choose to say something or to decide what to do next. It may well carry the subtitle "A Dad Dating Simulator" - and while it's certainly true you'll go on a handful of dates with the dads in town - there's none of the complexity you might expect from an actual sim.

Where Dream Daddy does succeed is in depicting a cast of characters you'll actually grow to like. At first the dads appear to be stereotypes - the preppy one, the goth one, etc - but take the time to get to know them and you'll realise that the complexity is revealed in the deep characterisations of everyone you meet. Indeed, the real star of the show is the relationship between Amanda and her dad. But I guess Dream Daughter: A Parenting Simulator hasn't got quite the same ring to it. *DAVID WILDGOOSE* PC

OR TRY THIS:

THE SIMS 4
MAXIS, 2014
+ More than mere dating
− Watch your daddy pee

HATOFUL BOYFRIEND
DEVOLVER, 2014
+ Quirky visual novel
− We're scared of pigeons

MASS EFFECT 3
BIOWARE, 2012
+ Garrus is your daddy
− But not Wrex

VERDICT:

Beyond the "gay dad" novelty lies a charming, heartwarming visual novel.

7

Tech 265

YOUR GUIDE TO PC GAMING HARDWARE

Smelling Roses

All things in moderation

Technology can be a wonderful way to escape the boredom and problems each of us have to endure through the course of our normal lives. Whether it's playing a game, building a new PC, reading on a tablet or playing games on your mobile on the tram, there's a thousand and one ways that it can keep us happy. It can even be helpful in times of need; if you're feeling alone, jump online and make pals with the thousands of other gamers raiding and shooting.

And yet it can also do the opposite. Get on any form of local transport and you'll see most of the commuters face's glued to the screen. I was recently having drinks with a friend at a pub, and we couldn't believe how many tables of groups were all just scrolling through Facebook rather than chat to the person next to them. And then there's the moments you miss because you spent too much time playing Battlefield or watching Netflix. I had a family emergency this month where I almost lost a family member, and it made me realise the many hours I could have spent with him instead of being stuck to the couch watching Netflix, or organising a group night in Squad.

I'm not saying that technology is bad, but we must use it in a measured fashion. Just like anything else in life, it's all about balance, and your love of tech should be a part of a well-rounded lifestyle, where friends, family and other activities are just as important. Don't let a scare be the reason you realise this, as I did.

Bennett Ring
Tech Editor

Our Power Award is given to products that are best in class no matter your budget.

Our Smart Buy Award goes to products that balance performance with price tag.

Contents

73 Tt Core P1 TG
74 VPN Virtues
78 X299 Motherboards
84 QNAP TS0-253B
85 Asus ROG Strix X370
86 Katana Soundbar
86 Asus ROG Strix Magnus
87 Tt Esports X-Comfort
87 Astro A10

THE PCPP TESTBENCH

CPU
INTEL I7 3770K
intel.com.au

MOBO
GIGABYTE Z77X-UD3H
gigabyte.com.au

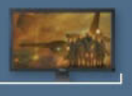
SSD
CORSAIR NEUTRON
corsair.com

RAM
8GB PATRIOT DDR3 2,133MHz
patriotmemory.com

GPU
RADEON HD 7970
amd.com

PSU
CORSAIR AX860I
corsair.com

DISPLAY
DELL U2711
www.dell.com.au



CASE

Thermaltake Core P1 TG

The ultimate DIY case

PRICE $149
www.thermaltake.com.au

There many things that make this an incredibly unique case, not least of which is that you basically have to build the entire thing from the ground up. Secondly, it's on open case, meaning there's no front, top, bottom or rear panels – there's just the two sides. This makes it amazing at dissipating heat, but on the flip-side you get basically zero audio isolation from the components within.

When we say you have to build this thing from the ground up, we mean it. There are around 20 different components, and you can pick and choose which ones you need and – to a certain extent - where they go. It's even possible to print your own parts using a 3D printer, or download 3D printing designs from the library at the Thermaltake 3DMakers website, free of charge.

One side of the case is a hollow steel chassis, which is perfect for hiding away your cables, while the other side is thick 5mm tempered glass. It's an ITX case though, so there's not enough room for an ATX board – for that you'll need to upgrade to the core P3. There are three orientations that the case can be configured in; vertical, horizontal and wall-mounted. If you want to go for the latter option, you'll have to buy the optional wall-mount kit though. Test-bench users will love being able to use it as an open case without the glass side, as it provides super easy access to all components, and we're planning on installing our test-bench into the larger P3 case on a full-time basis.

As seen at Computex, this is one of the new breed of cases that supports vertical graphics card installation, even when the case is built in the vertical mode. This is thanks to a riser cable and adjustable PSU bracket, both of which are included in the case, unlike several other brands, who will be charging extra for this feature.

Given Thermaltake's rich history in cooling, we're a little surprised at the lack of fan mounts, but being an open-case design it doesn't need the case fans that normal cases have. There's room for a 240mm radiator, as well as twin 120mm fans on the left of the case.

This is one of the most unique cases on the market, and truly a DIY'ers delight. If you're an RGB addict, the tempered glass and open sides will show off your light display beautifully, while the open design means heat issues are a thing of the past. It might be a little noisy for some, and it's also a tad expensive given it's an ITX case that lacks much of the material used in other cases. Still, if you want something that stands out from the crowd, it doesn't get much more different than the Thermaltake Core P1 TG.

BENNETT RING PC

> "we're planning on installing our test-bench into the larger P3 case on a full-time basis"

+
- Incredibly unique
- Beautiful if you love RGB lighting
- Very flexible

-
- A little pricey for an Mini-ITX case
- Not the case for those who want a quick and simple build

VERDICT:

Cases don't get much more unique than this, nor as flexible when it comes to different types of builds

PC PowerPlay POWER AWARD

9

VPN VIRTUES

When is a Virtual Private Network worth it? **BENNETT RING** serves the answers.

Ever since Pirate Bay has been blocked, your Facebook page has probably been bombarded with thousands of adverts promoting VPNs, or Virtual Private Networks. They promise to keep the copyright police at bay, while also allowing you to watch any global network streaming service no matter if it's geoblocked. But how do they actually work, do they do the job, and most importantly, can they alter the gaming experience?

HOW DOES A VPN WORK

The concept behind a VPN is actually relatively simple. Rather than your network traffic travelling directly from your PC to a website server or game server, your traffic is directed straight from your PC to a server delivered by your VPN provider. This server then routes your traffic and the return data back to your PC over an encrypted connection. So for example, if I'm trying to access the HBO site from Australia, which is normally geoblocked, the VPN tunnel hides my location, and I can now access the HBO service. This is one of the main benefits of a VPN, but security is also key.

By encrypting all of your send and receive requests, it makes it that much harder for hackers and data snoops to see what you're sending. While we absolutely do not condone downloading copyrighted material such as this week's Game of Thrones episode, by using a VPN, it makes it next to impossible for the copyright owner to see what you're downloading.

There are many different types of VPNs, but that's out of the scope of this article – some use different network topology or security types to get the job done.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD VPN?

We spoke to Liz Kintzele, VP of Sales & Director of Marketing at Golden Frog, GmbH, to get her company's views on several different VPN matters. First of which is – what makes one VPN better than the rest? According to Liz, first and foremost it's the speed and performance of the VPN network. To ensure that a VPN network is zippy and responsive, it must have a large number of VPN servers distributed around the world. Not only does this help when large numbers of users are using the VPN, but it also lowers the latency for local users, and issue many Australians find with using overseas-based VPNs. Golden Frog has a map of all of its VPN servers, available to view online here: *www.goldenfrog.com/vyprvpn/features/vpn-server-locations*. There are three in Australia – one in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney.

As you can see from the screenshots, while VyprVPN didn't hugely affect download speeds, it did dramatically increase ping. We were testing on a 100Mbit/sec fibre to the home Optus connection, and with the VPN disabled got a 3ms ping to the local Optus server. Turning on the VPN connection increased this to 29ms. However, Golden Frog does have a solution for this – more about that later.

◀ VyprVPN uses Chameleon Protocol to get around VPN blocking tech.

Next up is ease of use. Most mainstream gamers aren't hugely network savvy, so setting up a VPN should a quick and simple affair. In the case of the VyprVPN offered by Golden Frog, it's a simple app that you can install on your PC, tablet or even phone. Hit connect and you're good to go. From there, you can easily change which server you're connected to, tricking US servers that you're streaming your films and movies locally.

Other features are things like VyprVPNs Chameleon Protocol, which it uses to get around VPN blocking technology. Many media streaming companies have realised that users are now employing VPNs to get around their geoblocking technology, so not all VPNs will allow access to all streaming services to Australia.

▲ Liz Kintzele, VP of Sales & Director of Marketing at Golden Frog

OUTFOX

One of the latest services offered by VyprVPN is its Outfox product. They're not the first company in the world to offer such a network, with the likes of WTFast offering similar services. Bear with us, as this can get a little technical.

> "a simple app you can install on your PC, tablet or even phone. Hit connect and you're good to go"

Firstly, your PC sends packets to your ISP, which are then routed to the game server by the ISP's Border Gateway Protocol. The packets are then directed through an Autonomous System (AS), comprised of networks that each have an Autonomous System Number (ASN). The BGP then uses ASNs to route your traffic and the potential paths are listed in a routing table.

Now, in this instance, the router will choose the path with the least ASNs to get your packets to the game server. This sounds all well and good, but it may choose a route that has the least hops, but one of those hops along the way could be a high-latency hop, and you end up with lag.

Outfox fixes this issue by continually monitoring the quality of the connection – if it detects high-latency or another issue, it will change the path of your data pockets, and thus leading to a lower ping.

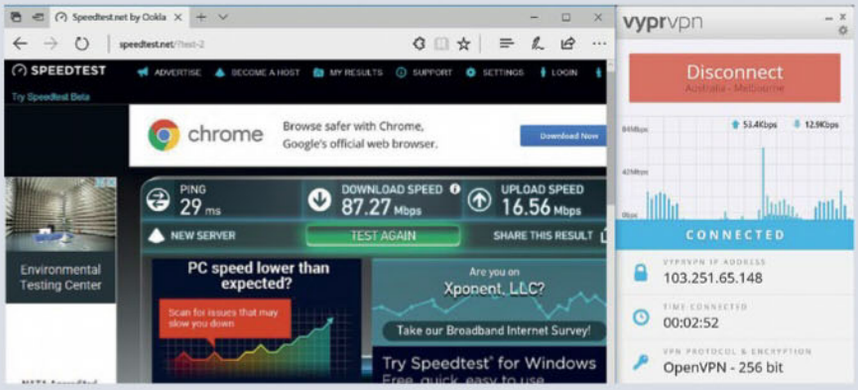
24/7 OR NOT

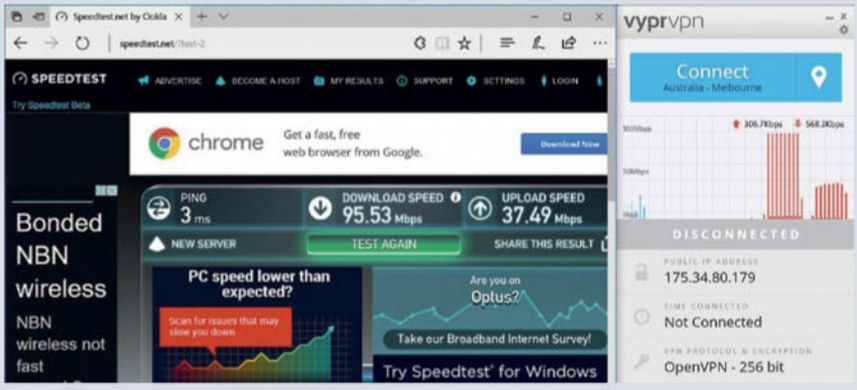
Given our increase with latency, we wouldn't recommend using a VPN at all times. However, when you're not gaming, we think it's definitely worth keeping on at all other times. This is especially true when you're on a Wi-Fi network, as it firms up the security immensely. Also, with many governments now having data retention policies, a VPN means they can't see what you're sending, no matter how innocent it is.

WTFast 3.5.5.428
WTFAST
Support | Start New Game | Logout
GAME CONNECTION REPORTING World of Warcraft US
Statistics
60 Minutes | 10 Minutes
WTFast
Internet
Ping Graph
Lost Packets
ALERT: Your settings may not be optimized for the best connection. Read more...
Connection Improvement
No Improvement
Active connections 2
Est. WTFast Server Location Honolulu, US
Est. Game Server Location United States
Active server HW2:3724
Game Connection Time 00:08:31
Ping 142 ms
Bytes received 317.00 kB
Bytes sent 4.56 kB
Connection Stats | WTFast | Internet | Connection Stat Improvement %
Ping Spikes 0 3 100%
Ping Flux Avg 0 ms 21 ms 100%
10 Sec Ping 142 ms 62 ms
Ping Average 142 ms 60 ms
Lost Packets 0 0

▲ **Like Outfox, WTFast works to reduce lag.**

▼ **Our speed test shows VPNs can degrade performance.**





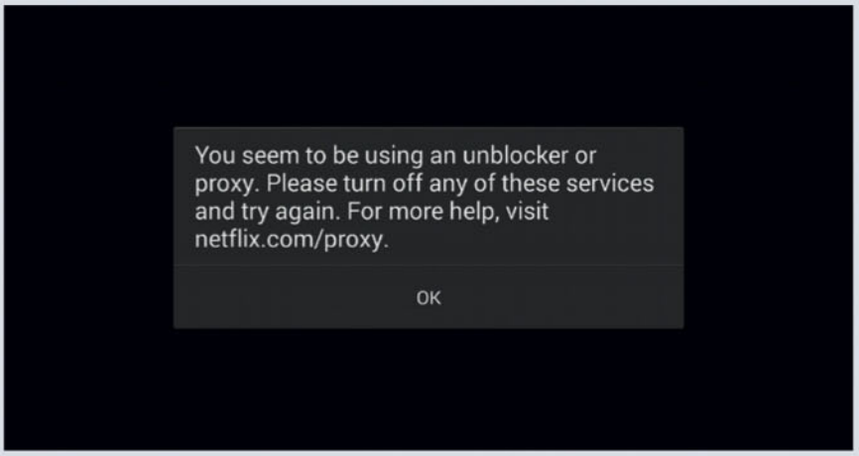
Some VPN apps will automatically engage when they note that you're using Wi-Fi or a certain app, and stay off at other times, making the process incredibly simple. It's also possible to use a VPN to get around your ISP throttling your connection if you happen to use all of your data for the month; if it can't tell who you are, it can't then throttle your connection.

POLITICAL USES

The ability to spoof the location of your PC isn't just great for getting the latest episode of Twin Peaks. VPNs are at the core of many online revolutions, where the government has extremely strict monitoring of their country's networks in place. By tricking the network into thinking that you're streaming from Australia, it's given local political activists the ability to communicate using the Internet.

Unfortunately this is becoming harder as governments have realised the weakness of their networks. Many now employ deep packet inspection (DPI) to look deep inside each packet and see if it's being transported via VPN. For example, the 'Great Firewall of China' has been able to identify and throttle encrypted communication, and block sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. It's going to take new VPN technologies to get around these issues.

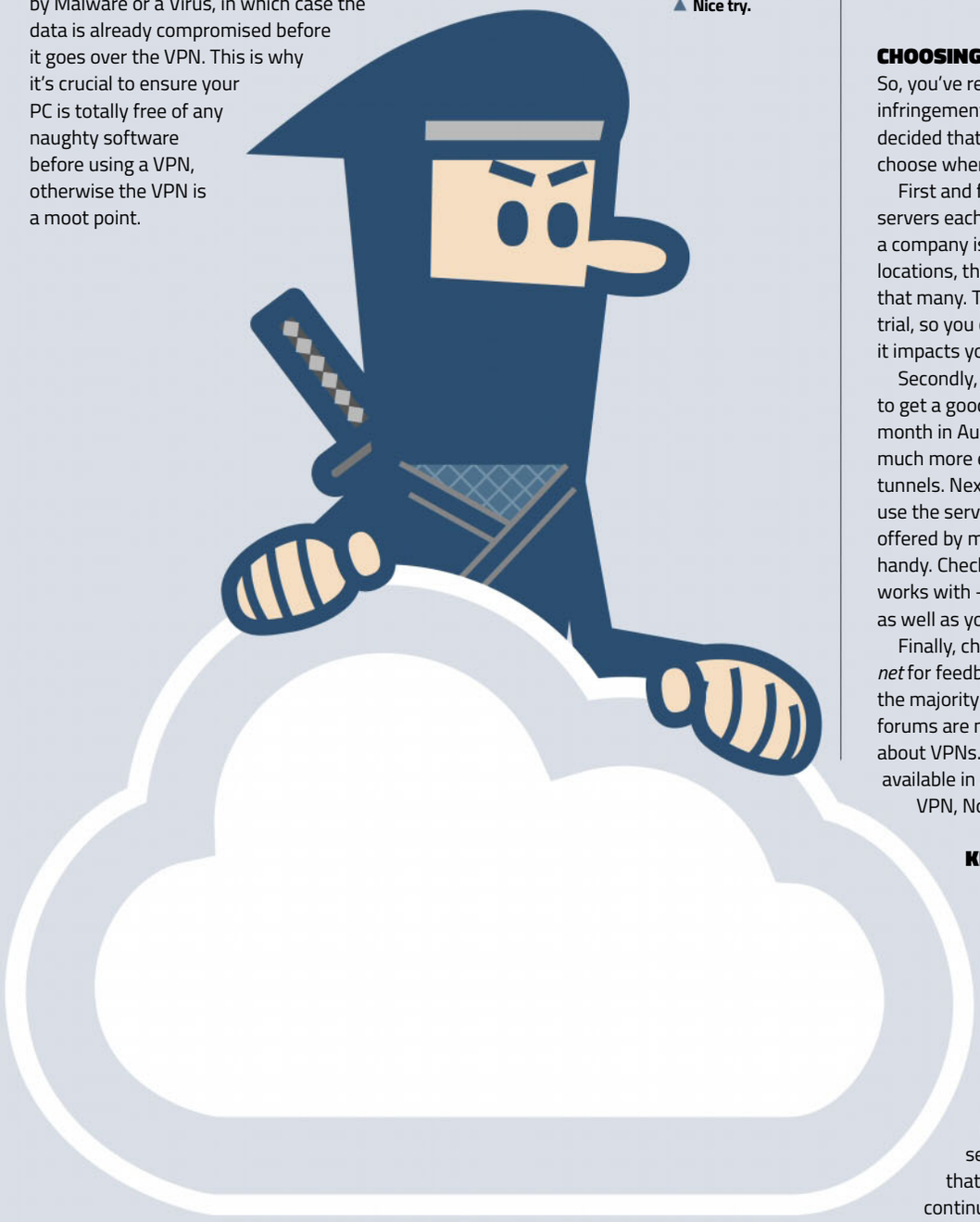
> it's possible to get a good VPN service for around $9 per month in Australia


You seem to be using an unblocker or proxy. Please turn off any of these services and try again. For more help, visit netflix.com/proxy.
OK

▲ Nice try.

WEAKNESSES OF VPNS

As well as their ability to be targeted by DPI, if a specific VPN is targeted, it's likely that the data can be compromised. There's also the risk that the host machine sending the data over the VPN has already been compromised by Malware or a Virus, in which case the data is already compromised before it goes over the VPN. This is why it's crucial to ensure your PC is totally free of any naughty software before using a VPN, otherwise the VPN is a moot point.



CHOOSING YOUR VPN

So, you've received your second copyright infringement letter in the mail, and have decided that a VPN is for you. But how do you choose when there are so many on the market?

First and foremost is find out how many servers each company has in Australia. If a company isn't willing to share its server locations, there's a good chance they don't have that many. Thankfully most VPNs offer a free trial, so you can give each one a go to see how it impacts your download speeds and latency.

Secondly, don't pay too much. It's possible to get a good VPN service for around $9 per month in Australia. Corporate grade VPNs are much more expensive as they offer multiple tunnels. Next up, check out how easy it is to use the service, and once again the free trials offered by most VPN companies will come in handy. Check how many devices the service works with – will it encrypt your phone's data as well as your PC's?

Finally, check out forums like *www.whirlpool.net* for feedback from other users and see what the majority recommend. The folks on these forums are network lords, so know all there is about VPNs. Some of the top VPNs currently available in Australia are IPVanish, Express VPN, NordVPN, SlickVPN and VyprVPN.

KEEPING THE INTERNET FREE AND OPEN

As governments around the word continue to squeeze the Internet with even heavier monitoring and data retention laws, tools like VPNs will become ever important to keep the Internet a free and open tool for humans to communicate. It's a cat and mouse game, but as usual, it seems to be the commercial world that has the lead. Let's hope they can continue to do so. PC

X299 THE CORE OF THE ISSUE

How do the mobos for Intel's new CPU stack up? **BENNETT RING** puts four to the floor.

Last month we dug deep into the performance of Intel's new Core-X series of CPUs, but at the time motherboards with the necessary X299 chipset were rarer than hen's teeth. They're still not exactly filling shelves, but we've managed to round up four boards that we think Core-X gamers will be interested in.

We should point out that we expected the X299 chipset-based boards to be a little more affordable than the previous X99 boards, to compete with AMD's Ryzen compatible motherboards. We were wrong. The lowest price we could find was $499, with prices rising exponentially from there. It's understandable that motherboard manufacturers are trying to make a buck, but when boards are often approaching the $750+ mark, it's starting to feel a little bit like we're being taking advantage of.

THE X299

Before we delve into the following four boards, let's take a quick refresh of the X299 chipset. It uses the new LGA 2066 socket, which is absolutely mandatory for any Core-X CPUs, including the low-end i7-7740X, which is basically an i7-7700K in a new socket. It comes with a default of eight SATA 3 6Gbit/sec ports, along with quad memory channels (eight memory slots), though the speed supported by these slots varies, between 2400MHz and 2666MHz, though mobo makers are hitting speeds of 4GHz and above with ease.

It also has 30 high speed I/O lanes, which can be used as 24 PCIe 3.0 lanes, eight SATA 3 ports, and up to ten USB 3.0 ports. Depending on the chip you use, there's a total of 44 PCIe 3.0 lanes available, but this varies depending on

X299 Motherboard Benchmarks

Cinebench CPU Single Core

HIGHER IS BETTER

SiSoft Sandra: Memory Bandwidth

AGGREGATE (GB/SEC - HIGHER IS BETTER)

Automatic Overclock Top Frequency

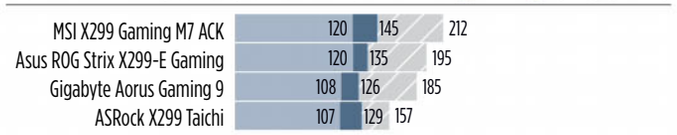
SPEED

[1] using OC dial
[2] using BIOS auto-overclock
[3] using the auto-overclock feature, which tries various frequencies and stress tests
[4] when set to 4.4GHz via A-Tuning app, but soon reverted to 4GHz

PRICES

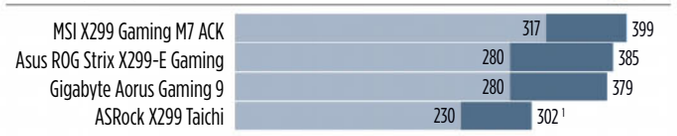
RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

GEOTHERMAL VALLEY (800 X 600, LOWEST DETAIL)



TOTAL WAR - WARHAMMER

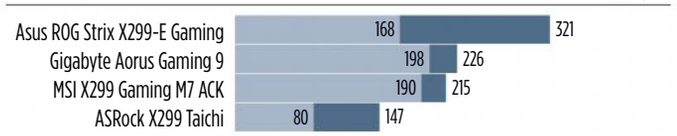
1024 X 768, LOW QUALITY



[1] with TBM3 associated to this game = min fps: 198 avg: 315

GHOST RECON WILDLANDS

1024 X 768, LOW DETAIL PRESET



3DMARK Cloud Gate

SCORE (HIGHER IS BETTER)

NOTES:
Asus Strix - AISuite 3 will not install, with error code 'CreateProcess failed (2)', even when using 7zip as requested by Asus, and using a newer version of the software. DUD.
Asus Strix - Turbo Boost Max 3 is working, same with MSI board
Asus Strix - due to AISuite3 not working, had to use the auto-overclock mode via BIOS, which keeps increasing frequency until unstable.
Taichi - new TBM3 drivers now see it working
All boards suffer from throttling with the H105. They may hit high speeds, but after a minute or two, drop back to 4.3GHz or so. You'll need severe cooling to maintain overclocking.

the CPU installed within. The chipset also supports Intel's new Turbo Boost Max technology 3.0, but we had major issues getting this to work reliably.

Despite uninstalling the driver on each board, and then reinstalling it on the next board, it only worked properly on two of the four boards, showing that Intel needs to put some work into ironing out any kinks with this technology. And when it did work, we didn't see much of a speed increase, likely due to the Corsair H105 cooler we're using, which struggles with the high TDP of an overclocked i7-7900X, the chip we used for testing. X299 obviously also supports Optane, though we'd wait a while for this caching memory to mature.

When it came time to test, we used our standard SSDs, Corsair memory, and an Aorus GeForce GTX 1080 graphics card, so we could compare our results with last month's CPU tests. This time around we focused more on gaming tests, running them at lower resolution and detail settings to limit bottlenecking elsewhere in the system. The i9-7900X doesn't come with a cooler, so Corsair were kind enough to supply a H105 AIO cooling system with 240mm radiator. All motherboards had the latest BIOS installed, memory speeds set to 2666MHz, and Turbo Boost Max 3.0 enabled in the BIOS.

On that note, let's see what the X299 series delivers; we've arranged them from cheapest to most expensive, so you can see exactly what you get for those extra dollars.

> "the lowest price we could find was $499, with prices rising exponentially from there"

MOBO

ASRock X299 Taichi

Needs more time baking in the oven

PRICE $499
www.asrock.com

We make no secret of the fact that we tend to be fans of ASRock products. They tend to deliver performance and features of boards that cost significantly more, but when it comes to their new X299 Taichi, this is definitely a product that needs more time in the labs for testing.

The biggest issue of all is performance. Despite this being one of the few boards that worked properly with Intel's Turbo Boost Max 3.0, with the software loading properly and allowing us to associate it with certain games, the Taichi placed well behind some of the other boards during the gaming tests. It delivered just 75% of the performance of the MSI board when it came to the Total War Warhammer test, and just 45% of the performance of the Asus ROG Strix X299-E Gaming in the Ghost Recon Wildlands benchmark.

We searched high and low for answers to these dismal numbers, including updating the BIOS, setting the BIOS to default (except the memory speed), installing most of the ASRock tools found on its sight, and reinstalling all of the crucial drivers, such as the Intel inf and Nvidia drivers. We even checked the CPU temp during stress tests to make sure our cooler was mounted correctly, which it was. After hours of troubleshooting we had to give up – it's obvious there's something more going on here, and ASRock needs to fix it.

Interestingly, as one of the only boards to support Turbo Boost Max 3.0 technology, the results from this weren't exactly mind-blowing. The average framerate in the Total War Warhammer benchmark rose from just 305 to 315, which isn't exactly exciting. However, it could be an issue with this board, so we're yet to pass judgement on Intel's latest Boost technology.

As for the rest of the board, in terms of features it's actually rather well stocked for the price. There are ten SATA 3 ports, along with three Ultra M.2 ports. Dual Internet Gigabit Ethernet ports are supplemented by integrated 802.11ac Wi-Fi, providing plenty of connectivity options.

13-phase power outdoes most of the competition, yet using the included A-Tune software, we were only able to hit 4.26GHz, which is even less than the 4.3GHz this CPU should run at. Again, we have to emphasise just how important a very powerful cooler is with the i9-7900X, which is what we blame for this poor result. In terms of USB, the rear I/O port includes two USB 3.1 10Gb/s (1 Type-A + 1 Type-C), and four 8 USB 3.0. There's not much on the board itself for overclockers, with just a power button and BIOS flashback button. Finally, there are four PCIe 3.0 x16 lanes and one PCIe 2.0 x1.

> "the Taichi placed well behind some of the other boards during the gaming tests"

Given ASRock's excellent reputation, it was a real shame to see the performance so far behind with the Taichi. At just half the speed of other boards in certain games, there's obviously something going on that needs to be looked at. Yet knowing ASRock, we're sure they'll fix these issues in no time. *BENNETT RING* PC

+
- Ten SATA 3
- Triple M.2 slots
- Subtle black board design

-
- Woeful performance in certain games

VERDICT:

ASRock needs to spend more time testing the already rushed X299 chipset to bring it anywhere near the speed of competing boards.

5

MOBO

Asus ROG Strix X299-E Gaming

A solid contender to enter the Core-X market

PRICE $589
www.asus.com

Given the high reputation of the Strix brand, we were rather happy to see that Asus hadn't slapped an $800 price on this mothboard. It's well within the pricing range of more affordable X299 boards (which is still rather expensive). Yet Asus has managed to deliver a well-balanced product, with a solid feature set and respectable performance.

We really appreciate the sticker that Asus puts on the memory slots, that show exactly how to populate them depending on how many sticks you use. Other boards use some rather strange memory slot configurations, so this little sticker saved us from having to browse through a 100 page manual. Speaking of memory, Asus rates this up to DDR4-4133MHz.

There are just three full length PCIe x16 lanes on this board, along with two x4 lanes and a single x1 lane. As expected, Asus has gone to town with the lighting on this board, supporting its Aura RGB technology. Yet there only seem to be two lighting zones on the board, but it is possible to plug in an RGB strip.

Twin M.2 drives can be mounted under the rather large heat spreaders, and there's even room for a small fan if you want to install one yourself – it'd be kind of nice if Asus had done that for owners already though. A single Intel® I219V Ethernet port is included, which includes Asus' own anti-surge technology to stop unhealthy zaps frying your board. Asus has used its own version of the ALC1220 chip, the 'SupremeFX 8-Channel High Definition Audio CODEC S1220A', which has slightly better SnB ratios than the basic ALC1220.

There's plenty of room for fans, with a total of one CPU FAN header, one CPU_Opt FAN, twin Chassis FAN, one M.2 FAN, another AIO Water Pump and finally a custom water pump header that we assume delivers extra power. As for other onboard overclocking options, there's really not much to said. A single BIOS flashback button is included on the I/O panel, but there are no onboard buttons other than a small power button.

Asus has stuck with the default eight SATA 3 ports offered by the X299 chipset, and has also stuck with a rather standard USB setup. There's a header for a USB 3.1 Gen 2 front panel connector port(s), while at the rear we have an ASMedia USB 3.1 Gen 2 controller that handles twin USB 3.1 Gen 2 port(s), one of Type-A, the other USB Type-CTM. Finally, there are four USB 3.1 Gen 1 ports and another two USB 2.0 ports.

> "Asus has delivered a well-balanced product, with a solid feature set and respectable performance"

When it comes to performance, this board took out the second spot in nearly every test. Considering it's just $70 or so more than other boards, that's a pretty healthy increase. The 4.35GHz overclock wasn't so impressive, but we think like all X299 boards, getting your hands dirty is the way to go rather than relying on automated processes. Overall this is a very solid platform; affordable, fast, and a decent feature set, without burning your bank account to the ground.
BENNETT RING PC

+
- Excellent performance
- Good M.2 heatsink
- Solid power capacitor heatsink

-
- Not the best auto overclock
- Relatively standard feature set for X299

VERDICT:

A good balance between performance and features without blowing the bank. Highly recommended.

PC PowerPlay POWER AWARD

9

MOBO

MSI X299 Gaming M7 ACK

Fantastic value for top-tier performance

PRICE $589
www.msi.com.au

As one of the most affordable boards in the roundup, we have to say that the MSI X299 Gaming M7 ACK kicks some serious butt. It may not have quite as many features as other boards, but when it comes to gaming performance, this thing blew it out of the park, and we didn't have to spend hours trying to extract this level of performance.

Like all of the boards, it's a standard ATX, but MSI has managed to squeeze plenty of PCIe lanes onto the board. There are four steel-reinforced full length x16 lanes, along with another twin x1 lanes. It's got the full eight memory slots (some X299 budget boards will only ship with four), and these are rated to handle up to DDR4-4000 when overclocked. Speaking of which, we used the MSI overclocking knob to hit a maximum CPU speed of 4.6GHz, though we did notice that this would drop over time, likely due to thermal throttling. If you want to overclock Core-X CPUs, you're going to need some extreme cooling solutions. Tweakers will love the onboard power, reset, BIOS flashback and voltage monitoring points, all very welcome inclusions at this price. The power system is all digital, and has twelve phases in total. Along with the usual 24-pin and 12-pin power plugs, there's an auxiliary 4-pin power connector, which is apparently for extra video cards.

Given the price, we can forgive the six SATA 3 ports, even though X299 has a default of eight, but there's also a U.2 port for high speed drives. Twin M.2 slots are hidden behind a chunky heatsink, which is mounted on a unique hinge system. Simply unscrew the two screws on one end, and the entire heatsink folds outwards. The heatsinks are nice and thick as well, unlike some of the 1mm heatsinks found on other boards. The cooling around the CPU power subsystem isn't exactly huge compared to the competition, but we didn't have any heat related crashes during our many benchmarks.

Killer has delivered the network nuts and bolts, with a Killer Ethernet port and Killer 802.11ac Wi-Fi. As for USB, at the rear IO panel there is one Gen2, Type C, one Gen2, Type A and four Gen1, Type A. There's also another three USB 2.0 ports for lower speed devices, which sit next to the antennae connection points.

Finally, audio uses MSI's standard 'AUDIO BOOST 4 PRO' solution, which is based on the ever-popular Realtek ALC 1220 with the usual upgraded capacitors, PCB isolation, and keeping the left and right channels on different levels of the PCB. In other words, it's doing basically what everybody else is doing with this chipset, and listening tests placed it identically to other boards.

> "if you want to overclock Core-X CPUs, you're going to need some extreme cooling solutions"

It may not have quite as many features as the other boards, but this thing is fast. It wiped the floor with the other boards in around half of our benchmarks. As such, it's a great, semi-affordable way to start your Core-X build. *BENNETT RING* PC

+
- Excellent performance
- Affordably by X299 standards
- Great M.2 heatsinks

-
- Only six SATA 3 slots
- Who uses the U.2 connection?
- Same audio as everybody else

VERDICT:

Given the price, we were most impressed by the performance, esp. when it came to simple overclocking.

PC PowerPlay SMART BUY

9

MOBO

Gigabyte Aorus Gaming 9

Overpriced and underdelivering

PRICE $795
www.gigabyte.com.au

We've become quite accustomed to Gigabyte charging rather high prices for its boards, but when you compare it to what else is on the market, it's really hard to justify those extra $250. So what does $800 of motherboard buy you?

The first thing you'll notice about this board is that it's much heavier than the others. Whether that's due to extra PCB layers, or better heatsinks, or metal backplate is hard to figure out. You also get the best automatic overclock of the lot, with this board hitting 4.6GHz using its auto-tune feature. This basically tests the board at a given frequency, then repeats the process until it hits its max. Not only that, it was rock solid at 4.6GHz, not dropping down to 4.3GHz like the other boards.

There's also a huge amount of PCIe x16 lanes, with a total of five steel-reinforced lanes. On the flipside, this means there are no other smaller PCIe lanes; thankfully any PCIe device, be it x4 or x8, will work in a x16 lane. There's also three M.2 slots, each of which includes a nice meaty heatsink. Just eight SATA 3 ports are included, two less than more affordable boards.

Disco fans will appreciate the 'RGB fusion' support to hook up all your whiz bang light devices, and this board is literally covered in light zones, with nearly every section of the board having its own lighting zone. As expected at this price, twin Ethernet is included thanks to a single Intel Ethernet connector along with a Rivet Networks Killer E2500 LAN as well as Killer's 802.11ac solution. We're surprised to see the absence of Thunderbolt 3 given how common it is on other high-end Gigabyte boards, but there is a header if you want to fork out for this optional extra.

This board is an overclocker's delight, with onboard buttons for Eco, OC, reset and power buttons. Despite the use of the Creative SoundBlaster 720˚ branding on the board, it actually uses the exact same ALC1220 codec as the other boards on the market, and yet again beefed up with extras to get the best possible sound. Gigabyte claims a 127dB SNR, and also includes its user-replaceable AMP-UP upgradeable amplifier.

A nice touch is the already-installed I/O plate, which covers the four USB 3.1 Type, one USB 3.1 Type C and four USB 3.0 ports. It's also lit up, so when you go digging around behind your board, you can actually see what each port does.

When it came to put it through its paces, the board performed around the middle of the pack – not exactly enticing news when you're spending almost $800 on your board. There's also not that many features that set this aside from the rest, apart from the massive amount of lighting zones. Oh, did we mention we couldn't get Intel's Turbo Boost Max 3.0 technology to work with this board.

> "you also get the best automatic overclock of the lot, hitting 4.6GHz using its auto-tune feature"

As such, there's simply no justifying such a sky-rocketing price. Gigabyte needs to deliver a hell of a lot more if it's going to charge 40% more than the competition. *BENNETT RING* PC

+
- Oh the pretty lights
- Lots of PCIe x 16 lanes
- Excellent network connectivity

-
- Terribly overpriced
- Mid-range performance

VERDICT:

Gigabyte needs to pull out all the stops to justify this price, and unfortunately has failed to do so this time around.

7

NAS

QNAP TS0-253B

A multimedia muncher

PRICE $799 (EXCLUDING DRIVES)
www.qnap.com

If you're anything like us, you probably use your NAS for two main purposes. First, to back up your super-critical data with redundancy. Secondly, as a media server. The first use is pretty easy for even the cheapest NAS devices, but running as a media server takes a whole lot more grunt, especially if you want to run PLEX. Well, the QNAP TS0-253B has more than enough oomph to chew through your PLEX library, which explains why it's so expensive for a dual bay device.

QNAP has gone for a new look with this NAS. The left side simply slides away to reveal the twin drive bay mounts, which can handle both 3.5mm and 2.5mm drives. On the right of the face is a polished blue plate that includes all of the relevant controls. There's several LEDs to show the status, as well as a six-in-one card reader, USB 3.0 Type-C and USB 3.0 Type A port. There's also a small OLED screen showing basic system info.

Heading to the rear reveals another four USB 3.0 Type-A ports, twin HDMI 1.4 out, dual mic in and a speaker out. There's also twin Ethernet out, which can be link aggregated to double bandwidth. Basically you can plug in a monitor, mouse and keyboard, and use this as a standalone PC, though it obviously doesn't run Windows.

The reason for the high price is the powerful CPU within, Intel's Celeron J3455 quad-core, which runs at a base speed of 1.5 GHz, up to 2.3 GHz when things get tough... like running PLEX. There's a base level of 4GB of DDR3L, but you can easily double this to 8GB. Another unique feature is the inclusion of a PCIe slot, which can be used to handle a 10GbE card, or dual M.2 SSD card, a wireless card or a USB 3.1 10Gbps card.

As usual, the interface is beautiful, and QNAP has really increased the functionality of this unit by developing more software that can be installed. A few key examples are DJ2 streaming software, Virtualisation Station to operate several VMs on the NAS and QmailAgent, which allows you to centralise all of your various email accounts (Gmail, Outlook, etc) into one central account.

It may not be the most affordable dual-bay NAS on the market, but it is one of the most powerful and versatile around. For that reason alone, it's a cracker if you can afford it, and for a PLEX-ready NAS, it's actually one of the cheaper ones around. *BENNETT RING* PC

> "more than enough oomph to chew through your PLEX library, which explains why it's so expensive"

+
- Powerful hardware
- Front OLED display
- Lots of plug-ins

-
- Pricey for twin-bay

VERDICT:

This is one of the best twin-bay – albeit most expensive – NAS devices on the market.

PC PowerPlay POWER AWARD

9

MOBO

Asus ROG Strix X370-F Gaming motherboard

Another wallet-friendly Ryzen board

PRICE $299
www.asus.com.au

It's so refreshing to be able to write a review of an AMD motherboard in PC PowerPlay. After years with only Intel boards, it's an absolute pleasure to write about Ryzen compatible boards like the new Asus ROG Strix X370-F Gaming motherboard. Based on the fastest Ryzen chipset, the X370, it's the perfect example of how Ryzen delivers multi-core performance on a micro-budget scale.

Consider the fact that this is the top of the line chipset for Ryzen 7, yet only costs $299. Look at Intel's new X299 boards in this month's roundup, and you'll see they start at $500 and keep going up from there. Yet this ATX board comes loaded to the brim with goodies, and Asus doesn't feel the need to charge the Earth for it.

Eight SATA 3 ports will cost you twice this on an Intel platform, though there is only a single M.2 slot for your high-speed drives. At least it's far away from the main PCIe lane, so shouldn't suffer unduly from sweaty conditions. A total of three full-length PCIe x16 lanes are included, along with another three x1 lanes. AMD has taken a slightly different approach to Intel when it comes to PCIe lanes, offering 24 in total, but it seems that only sixteen of these run direct from the CPU to the graphics cards lanes. Four run to the chipset for communication, with another four for I/O. This means it's SLI ready, but you're not going to have many lanes left for the likes of high speed drives or USB devices. This means if you do go for a twin Nvidia configuration, you're going to be stuck with one M.2 device, provided it's of the PCIe 3.0 x4 variety.

As an X370 board, it's ready to overclock your Ryzen chip, and Asus has provided a wealth of options to do so. When it comes to audio, Asus is once again using its proprietary tweak of the ALC1220 chipset, which it calls the S1220A audio codec. This is found on its high-end boards, along with the usual audio upgrades such as better capacitors and amps.

Obviously there's also support for Asus' Aura lighting system, with twin RGB light headers and the rear I/O plate including RGB lighting. Intel Ethernet has been enhanced with Asus' proprietary 'LANGuard' feature, which it claims will protect from electrical spikes delivered over your Ethernet. Unfortunately there's no Wi-Fi, but that's the norm at this price point.

This board is a fantastic basis for a mid-range Ryzen system, with a great price point balanced out by a robust feature set. When you do the figures compared to a Core-X system, it's products like the Asus ROG Strix X370-F Gaming motherboard that prove why the Ryzen ecosystem is so economically attractive for multicore users. *BENNETT RING*PC

> "this ATX board comes loaded with goodies, and Asus doesn't feel the need to charge the Earth for it"

+
- Robust feature set
- Enhanced audio
- Very affordable

-
- Only one M.2 slot
- Lack of PCIe 3.0 lanes

VERDICT:

Shows how AMD and its partners are delivering maximum performance at a most reasonable price.

PC PowerPlay SMART BUY

8

AUDIO

Creative SoundBlasterX Katana Soundbar

Clearing the bar

PRICE $449
au.creative.com

There aren't too many PC soundbars. Razer has their now fairly long in the tooth Leviathan, but aside from that there really isn't much in the market. The reason for this may be that the width of a monitor and the proximity of the soundbar to the listener impacts the number of speakers it can house and the tricks that can be used for surround sound. The Katana is a 2.1 setup with a tweeter and mid-bass driver on each end of the bar and a separate wired subwoofer.

The Katana is loud. Extremely loud. At only half maximum volume the speakers are deafening but still surprisingly crisp. Sound quality in the treble and mid ranges is excellent thanks to some quality drivers and a built in DAC capable of 24-bit/96Hz lossless playback. FLAC files and games sound great, but music streamed at lesser fidelity sounds pretty damn impressive as well. The rather light and skinny sub doesn't fare nearly as well, coming across as a little muffled and flat for the most part. The soundbar itself is quite a sleek and good looking unit, complete with RGBs if that's your thing.

So far so good, but there are a few significant problems with the Katana. For what is essentially a good 2.1 setup, the Katana is very expensive. This wouldn't be as much of a problem if the promised virtual 7.1 mode worked. It lacks any clear directionality and ultimately sounds like a worse 2.1 mix. The Katana performs well but when compared to the SBX Kratos 2.1 speakers you just can't justify the added price tag. *DANIEL WILKS* PC

+	• Looks great • Huge volume • Excellent 2.1
-	• Expensive • Poor surround • Weak sub

VERDICT:
Great stereo performance and deafening volume but it's hard to justify the price tag.

7

AUDIO

Asus ROG Strix Magnus

Magic mic

PRICE $299
www.asus.com/au

Looking something like a Transformer's deodorant stick, the ROG Strix Magnus is the most aggressively "gamer" styled microphone we've ever seen. It has weird silver flanges and cutouts, and, of course, the ubiquitous RGBs capable of syncing up with Aura technology so every Asus product you own can flash at the same time. Luckily there's more to the Magnus than flash. It's quite a compelling mic. Aimed squarely at the streamer/YouTube creator market, the Magnus features three condensers for three different recording modes; cardiodal for clear focussed single user recording, stereo for two or more on opposite sides of the mic and omnidirectional ENC (environmental noise cancelling) to cut down on feedback during like casting or in loud environments.

The unit is surprisingly light but is well built and delivers some very clear and precise audio recording. In cardiodal mode the quality of recording is excellent and clear. Voices sound rich and full. The bidirectional stereo mode is a little less precise but still pretty damn good. Unfortunately ENC didn't prove to be particularly effective, but if your recording space is loud enough to warrant needing active noise cancellation it's time to rethink your studio.

The Strix Magnus is a good, compact mic but the one thing that stands against it is the price tag. The RGBs do nothing but up the cost, making it around $100 more than the excellent Audio Technica AT2020 USB+. *DANIEL WILKS* PC

+	• Excellent audio quality • Compact
-	• RGBs add nothing but price

VERDICT:
An excellent mic hampered somewhat by its inflated price tag.

8

FURNITURE

Tt Esports X-Comfort Gaming Chair

Big and firm

PRICE $499
au.ttesports.com

Gaming chairs are the RGB fans of 2017. Late last year there were only a few gaming chair brands, but now every vendor seems to have their own model following roughly the same design, with a racing seat design and some bright colours. The Tt Esports X-Comfort is one of the few serious looking chairs, with nothing but a white logo adding a splash of brightness to the black of the chair. Designed for the bigger gamer, the X-Comfort has a 50cm wide seat and high, 83.5cm back rest, with a maximum weight supported of 150kg. We've put together a number of different chairs from numerous vendors over the last 12 months, and although they all follow the same general process when it comes to attaching the base and back, the X-Comfort was amongst the easiest, as none of the parts had to be muscled into place or held by another person while being attached. The armrests have four points of adjustment making them nice and comfortable and everything feels nice and stable. Not bad for what is probably the cheapest "premium" gaming chair on the market at the moment, with similar units from AK Racing, Noble and DXRacer ranging from $30 to around $240 more expensive. There is one major caveat to the X-Comfort though. You should definitely try before you buy – the seat is very firm with little actual give, so it doesn't necessarily live up to its name. A reinforced steel frame is good, but you don't always want to feel it. *DANIEL WILKS* PC

+	• Easy to put together • Solid • Wide
-	• Very firm • Pleather

VERDICT:

The X-Comfort is a little too firm for our tastes, but that seems to be the case with most gaming chairs.

8

AUDIO

Astro A10 headset

Affordable Astros? Awesome?

PRICE $99
www.astrogaming.com

We're fans of Astro gaming headsets, but they have never really been what you would call affordable, with the A50s retailing for around $400 the A40 around $300 and A38 around $200. Coming in at just shy of $100, the A10 is by far the cheapest headset in the Astro range. The big question is whether anything has been lost in the effort to keep the price down. The answer is both yes and no. The build quality of the headset is excellent. Even though it's made of plastic the headset still feels very robust, with a tightly strung headband for a good clamp and decently sized, well-padded earcups. Unfortunately these earcups house some rather uninspired 40mm drivers that do a decent job but fail to impress across the spectrum. They are OK for the price range, but given the amount of excellent competition from the likes of Steelseries, HyperX and Logitech, decent isn't good enough. Comfort is also a factor. The A10 is a fairly heavy headset, weighing in at 346g. This wouldn't be too much of a problem if the headband was better padded or if there was a sprung head strap to distribute the weight. The mic is well situated and clear. The Astro A10 headset is something of a mixed bag, offering excellent build quality and a good mic but average sound quality for the price range and not a huge amount of comfort. Given the existence of headsets like the Cougar Immersa, HyperX Cloud Stinger for $30-$40 cheaper and the Steelseries Arctis 7 and HyperX Cloud Revolver for around $20 more, the appeal of the A10s isn't hugely obvious. *DANIEL WILKS* PC

+	• Excellent build quality • Comfortable earcups • Good mic
-	• Uncomfortable headband • Uninspired audio quality

VERDICT:

Decent but uninspiring sound quality and not the most comfortable fit leaves the A10s struggling to find a place in the market.

7

HOTWARE 265

with Terrence Jarrad

01 ORII

$170 ▪ Origami Labs

kck.st/2uD958Q

All the cool kids are doing bone conduction (insert obligatory childish "that's what she said" here) these days. And here's a ring inspired in part by the visually impaired that uses bone conduction and voice control to take over many of the tasks of a smart phone.

POWERED UP: Ready to handle all your Google Assistant and Siri queries. Designed to be durable and splash proof to get through the average day.

PLAYED OUT: This thing is CHUNKY. And you're really going to want to practice that finger-in-ear look in the mirror because it'll be pretty easy to look like a doofus. Also, remember to clean your ears, because that's not what people mean when they say "wax lyrical".

02 Speakerhat

$TBA ▪ Atari

www.atari.com

If you've ever been playing music out of your phone for everyone on your crowded train carriage to hear and thought to yourself "Is it humanly possible to be more annoying than I am right now?" then Atari has the product for you. The Speakerhat.

POWERED UP: A Bluetooth speaker in a cap. Joy!

PLAYED OUT: Speakerhat? How many meetings did that name take? Come on Atari, put some effort in. Headbanger. Tune-gallon. Chapeaudio. Stetsonic. A-Cap-ella. WE'RE NOT EVEN TRYING, ATARI.

03 Retro Classic Keyboard

$170 ▪ Azio

bit.ly/2vqPc2X

We game, so we understand the value of a good keyboard. But while we might buy technically impressive gear, we don't often consider its looks beyond how cool it is. These keyboards combine the best of past and modern design sensibilities – in three different colour designs, no less!

POWERED UP: Zinc alloy frame, leather surface, height-adjustable pillar feet, and full backlight illumination. There are mechanical keys, and USB or Bluetooth connection options. Not a bad price considering gaming equivalents.

PLAYED OUT: Some macro keys would be nice? No mention of anti-ghosting.

04 Depict

$1300 ▪ Depict

depict.com

Digital photo frames are one of those things that never really caught on. Maybe it's time that changed.

POWERED UP: A 49 inch 4k "digital canvas" with wooden frame. Depict gives you complimentary and premium (paid) collections from which you can choose to configure your display. Changes easily made over Wi-Fi via the mobile app. Handily swivels between portrait and landscape.

PLAYED OUT: You'll need to hide the power cable. App is iOS only, probably because Android users hate all art.

05 Landspeeder

$700 ▪ Toys R Us

www.toysrus.com

There's a thing people say about parents living vicariously through their children being a bad thing, and well would you look at that, we're terrible parents now.

POWERED UP: Seating for two in this rechargeable 12 volt child-sized replica of Luke's X-34 Landspeeder made by Radio Flyer. It'll do 8km/h and 3km/h in reverse.

PLAYED OUT: It's maybe TOO CUTE or something? And it probably sucks that it only supports around 60kg passenger weight. And like, why isn't there an adult sized one? Hopefully the kids don't arrive home to find charred skeletons.

ON SALE NOW

HARDWARE & TECH SPECIAL 2017
AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG
PC PowerPlay
intel CORE X-series
COMPUTEX TAIPEI 2017
THE LATEST AND GREATEST PC HARDWARE STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOW FLOOR
DISPLAY REVOLUTION!
QUANTUM DOT • HDR
ULTRAWIDE • 4K
OLED • 1800R
INTEL VS. AMD
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A DECADE, AMD STEPS UP TO DELIVER A RANGE OF TRULY COMPETITIVE CPUS
AMD RYZEN THREADRIPPER
MASSIVE PERIPHERAL ROUNDUP
18 MICE, KEYBOARDS AND HEADSETS REVIEWED AND RATED
nextmedia
9 771326 564026 02
TECH SPL #8 2017
$11.99 • NZ $12.99 INC GST
CASE MODDING
WE SPEAK TO AUSTRALIA'S FINEST MODDERS ABOUT THEIR CRAFT
GPU ROUNDUP
THE BEST GRAPHICS CARD FOR EVERY BUDGET FROM THE RX550 TO GTX 1080Ti

BUY ONLINE AND SUBSCRIBE TO PC PowerPlay AT

mymagazines.com.au

INVENTORY

THE BEST BUILD FOR EVERY BUDGET

CONTROLLERS

Sometimes you gotta go mouse + keyboardless

Xbox One Controller
$89.95 *microsoft.com/en-au/*
Plug and play meets comfort. Every PC needs a controller and this is the best

Steam Controller
$89.95 *store.steampowered.com*
There's a bit of a learning curve, but it's great for couch gaming

MODEM ROUTERS

For all rational budgets

BUDGET

TP-Link VR600
$179 *tp-link.com*
Not the fastest, but it's stable, well priced and feature packed. ADSL modem built in

Synology Router RT1900ac
$199 *synology.com*
No built-in ADSL modem, but it's fast and has the best interface around

PREMIUM

NETGEAR R8000 Nighthawk X6 Tri-Band WiFi Router
$300 *netgear.com.au*
Formerly our pick for the Beast, this router is more than powerful and fast enough for all your gaming needs

LAPTOPS

Gaming on the go

BUDGET

Gigabyte P55W v5
$2099 *gigabyte.com.au*
If you want real gaming performance in a laptop, $2k is where it starts

PREMIUM

Metabox Prime-X
$6899 *metabox.com.au*
The fastest laptop around costs big

MINI

For lounge room gaming and streaming

CPU + COOLING
Intel Core i5 7500 w/ stock cooler
$254
intel.com

MOBO
ASRock Z270M-ITX/AC Motherboard
$200
asrock.com.au

GPU
Asus DUAL-RX480-4G
$338
asus.com.au

MEMORY
16GB DDR4 Corsair Vengeance LPX Low Profile$185
corsair.com/en-au

STORAGE
Samsung SSD M.2 2280 NVMe 250G 960 EVO + 2TB HDD (any)
$178 + $50 *samsung.com/au*

CASE
Fractal Design Define S Nano
$115
fractal-design.com

PSU
SilverStone SFX Gold 500W SX500-LG
$110
Silverstone.com

SOUND
Your sound system
What you paid for it

DISPLAY
Your TV
What you paid for it

KEYBOARD
Roccat Sova
$299
www.roccat.org

MOUSE
Roccat Kone EMP
$99
www.roccat.org

TOTAL: **$1833**

BUDGET

The perfect entry-level gaming PC

CPU + COOLING
Intel Core i5 7500 w/ stock cooler
$254
intel.com

MOBO
ASRock B250 Gaming K4 Motherboard
$150
asrock.com.au

GPU
Gigabyte RX480G1-GAMING-4GD
$279
gigabyte.com.au

MEMORY
G.Skill Ripjaws 4 DDR4 2400MHz 16GB Kit 2x 8GB
$135 *gskill.com*

STORAGE
2TB HDD (any)
$50 *www.staticice.com.au*

CASE
Corsair Carbide SPEC-02 Mid Tower Gaming Case
$70 *corsair.com/en-au*

PSU
SilverStone Strider Essential 500W ST50F-ESB $55
Silverstone.com

SOUND
Cougar Immersa
$59
cougargaming.com

DISPLAY
AOC e2450Swh
$158
aocmonitorap.com/anz

KEYBOARD
Tesoro Tizona G2N
$55
tesorotec.com

MOUSE
Rapoo V20 Optical Gaming Mouse
$35
rapoo.com

TOTAL: **$1300**

ASUS®
No.1 in Quality & Services
- The Wall Street Journal Asia
RT-AC5300
Wireless-AC5300
Tri-Band Gigabit Router

And thus it was that Theo slept as he couldn't deal with being awake while AMD continued teasing details of the Vega cards. He knew he'd probably have one next month and if the rumours were true, it could supplant the performance card...

PERFORMANCE

Most bells and whistles, without breaking the bank

CPU + COOLING
Intel Core i7 7700K with Noctua NH-D15 CPU Cooler
$459 + $120 *intel.com*

MOBO
MSI Z270 XPOWER Gaming Titanium Motherboard
$510
msi.com

GPU
Galax GTX 1070 EXOC Sniper White 8Gb
$575
asus.com.au

MEMORY
G.Skill RIPJAWS 4 32GB KIT 4X8GB
$289
gskill.com

STORAGE
2TB HDD (any) + SAMSUNG 500GB M.2 NVMe SSD 960 EVO
$375
samsung.com/au

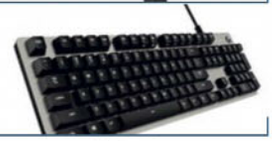
CASE
Corsair Graphite 760T Full Tower Case Black
$220
corsair.com/en-au

PSU
Be Quiet! Dark Power Pro 11 850W Power Supply
$260
bequiet.com

SOUND
Sennheiser PC 373D
$329
en-au.sennheiser.com

DISPLAY
Acer Predator XB271HU
$979
acerstore.com.au

KEYBOARD
Logitech G413 Silver
$129
www.logitech.com/en-au



MOUSE
Corsair Glaive
$109
www.corsair.com

TOTAL: **$4354**

THE BEAST

When overkill is barely enough...

CPU + COOLING
i9-7900X + Corsair H105
$1530 + $145
coolermaster.com

MOBO
MSI X299 Carbon Pro Gaming AC
$569
msi.com

VIDEO
Aorus GeForce GTX 1080 Ti Xtreme Edition 11G
$1229
gigabyte.com.au

MEMORY
2 x 16GB Corsair Vengeance LPX DDR4 3000
$318
corsair.com/en-au

STORAGE
Samsung 960 Pro 2TB + Seagate Barracuda Pro 10TB
$1649 + $699
samsung.com/au

CASE
CoolerMaster Cosmos II 25th Anniversary Edition
$449
coolermaster.com

PSU
Corsair RM1000i Special Edition
$205
corsair.com/en-au

SOUND
Astro A50
$469
www.astrogaming.com

DISPLAY
Asus ROG Swift PG27AQ
$1349
asus.com.au

KEYBOARD
Corsair K95 Platinum RGB
$349
corsair.com/en-au/

MOUSE
Razer Deathadder Elite
$99.95
razerzone.com/au-en/

TOTAL: **$9059.95**

Tri-band data rate of of 5334 Mbps
Ultra-fast 802.11ac Wi-Fi router
Smooth 4K/UHD video playback

2.4 GHz 1000 Mbps
5 GHz-1 2167 Mbps
5 GHz-2 2167 Mbps

Exclusive Built-In Game Accelerator

SUBSCRIBE TO PC PowerPlay

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG

FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN

A HEIGHT ADJUSTABLE DESK FROM ZEN SPACE DESKS!

DESK VALUED AT $1263

Every man and his dog seems to be making gaming chairs, but very few are building any other kind of gaming furniture. Enter Zen Space Desks and their gaming range. These desks are height adjustable from sitting to standing with four programmable points available at the touch of a button, ensuring that you can have the most comfortable gaming sessions ever. In addition, the desk features built in cable management, a CPU mount and a desk wrap!

**Monitor arm, monitor and VR headset not included*

HOW TO ENTER: For your chance to win this fantastic prize, simply subscribe or renew to PC PowerPlay and tell us in 25 words or less ***How will winning the desk change the way you play?***

GET THE BEAST ON YOUR CHEST!

Receive a complimentary PCPP t-shirt when you subscribe *

Subscribe for your chance to share in a
$2500*
Father's Day big cash windfall!
10 CASH PRIZES OF $250 TO BE WON!
Subscribe now at
mymagazines.com.au/windfall

WHY SUBSCRIBE?

HUGE SAVINGS on cover price
FREE delivery to your door
NEVER miss an issue!
*BONUS t-shirt

mymagazines.com.au

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

3 EASY WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE!

Please photocopy the form if you don't want to ruin your awesome mag

ONLINE: mymagazines.com.au

OR CALL US:
1300 36 11 46
or +612 9901 6111 (overseas)

POST TO:
PCPP SUBSCRIPTIONS
LOCKED BAG 3355,
ST LEONARDS NSW 1590

YES! I'LL SUBSCRIBE TO PC PowerPlay

Me Gift (Please tick one)

☐ ☐ **26 DISC issues** (2 years) at $199.00 – SAVE OVER $156!
+ BONUS t-shirt

☐ ☐ **13 DISC issues** (1 year) at $129.00 – SAVE OVER $48
+ BONUS t-shirt

S M L XL (Select your T-Shirt size)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Preferred t-shirt size (Australia & New Zealand Only)

(S: 49cm chest, 72cm length. M: 52cm chest, 75cm length. L: 55cm chest, 78cm length. XL: 58cm chest, 80cm length)

Enclosed is a cheque/money order for A$_____
made payable to nextmedia Pty Ltd OR please charge my credit card:

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ American Express

☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐

Name on card:_____Expiry Date:_____/_____

Signature: _____ CVV:_____

My Details:

Full Name: _____

Address:_____

_____State:_____Postcode:_____

I am over 18 years of age ☐ Yes ☐ No

Daytime Telephone: ( )_____

E-mail Address:_____

Please provide phone or email in case of delivery issues

Please Send this Gift Subscription to:

Full Name: _____

Address:_____

_____State:_____Postcode:_____

Daytime Telephone: ( )_____

E-mail Address:_____

Tell us in 25 words or less, *How winning the desk will change the way you play?*_____

_____

_____

Prices and BONUS T-shirt offer* available to Aust & NZ residents only ending 13/9/17, include GST. Overseas: 13 issues A$189. Savings based on total cover price. Subscriptions commence with the next available issue, please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of your first magazine and separate delivery of your bonus t-shirt and prize/s (after 19/9/17). T-shirt sizes are subject to availability, while stocks last. A 1yr (12mth) subscription to PC Powerplay includes 11 disc issues and 2 special issues. This form may be used as a Tax Invoice. nextmedia Pty Ltd; ABN 84 128 805 970. Comp open to new, renewing or extending Aust & NZ residents, subscribing to PC Powerplay for a minimum of 1 year between 17/8/17 & 13/9/17. This is a game of skill. To be eligible to win you must answer the question provided in 25 words or less. One (1) subscriber will win a Zen Space Desk valued at $1263. Total prize pool is valued at $1263. Entries will be judged by the PC Powerplay editorial team on 19/9/17. The most creative answers will win. The judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The Promoter is nextmedia Pty Ltd, 207 Pacific Hwy, St Leonards, NSW 2065. This offer is NOT transferable or exchangeable. Our full Privacy Notice can be found at www.nextmedia.com.au. Please tick if you do not wish to receive special offers or information from nextmedia or its partners via ☐mail ☐email ☐phone. If you prefer to receive your communication electronically, please ensure we have your current email address.

*Father's Day Cash Competition: Conditions apply. Visit mymagazines.com.au/windfall for details and full competition terms and conditions. Offer ends 18/10/17.

MA/PCD265

The Walls Are Enough

Before there was Quake (and its true 3D environment) there was Doom. But before there was Doom, there was Wolfenstein 3D. This was the true progenitor of every first-person game we now take for granted. Thanks, Robot Hitler!

XENUS or BOILING POINT: WOLFENSTEIN 3D

DEVELOPER ID SOFTWARE
PERSONALITIES JOHN CARMACK, JOHN ROMERO AND TOM HALL
RELEASED 1992
NUTSHELL The true genius of this Nazi-blaster wasn't the atompunk WW2 theme, it wasn't the pseudo-almost-2.5D engine. It was the sheer speed, and the total commitment to that ol' ultraviolence.

Today, Wolfenstein 3D is museum piece, a curiosity. Its blurry sprite-based SS drones and vaguely-Nazi-shaped officers barely raise an eyebrow. And the giant swastikas on the walls are understood by all to be mere set-dressing, just like the golden eagles and occasional baffling chandelier.

But back in 1992, Wolfenstein 3D blew everyone's mind... and some people's lunch. Single-plane fakey-3D engines had been toyed with by various developers, but it took the programming genius of John Carmack and the undeniable gameplay instincts of John Romero and Tom Hall, to understand that an engine alone would not be enough.

Wolfenstein 3D's real gift to gaming history is its speed. Other toody-threedy games were slow, even turn-based. The AD&D branded Eye of the Beholder is an RPG classic. As for Ultima Underworld (still praised to this day, and a future Hagionaut trip), it actually came out two months before Wolf 3D.

Yet these games, for all their strengths, kept the sedate pace of the traditional RPG. Sword-and-sorcery games are all about picking your way through the catacombs, only occasionally screaming and lashing out with your sword or arcane fireball.

Wolfenstein 3D, on the other hand, was full-throttle, sprinting, screaming, bullet-spraying mayhem. The boys at id Software set the player's run speed to something insane, and a skilled player could literally run rings around those dastardly Nazis.

Weapons were all about firepower. More bullets, more blood, more "mein Leben". Levels were maze-like, packed with secret rooms and bonus pickups. It was all rather good fun.

Carmack, of course, was disappointed with how the game ran. Even as id Software grew too big for the boots its distributor Apogee gave it, Carmack was feverishly at work on another game you may have heard of: Doom. This, of course, would do everything Carmack hadn't had time (or the available CPU cache memory) to make Wolfenstein 3D do. The rest, as they say, is history.

The story of Wolf 3D is the story of id, the wholly positive early days of the company, where a bunch of nerds under the thumb of Softdisk were written secret fan mail by the boss of Apogee, in an attempt to poach them without letting Softdisk's nosy, mail-

opening receptionists know. Seriously - Apogee's president Scott Miller wrote John Romero multiple fan letters under multiple assumed names. It took Romero noticing a familiar address in a shareware game magazine to put two-and-two together.

First, id built Commander Keen. The little boy in the gridiron helmet was family-friendly, sure, but he demonstrated that the id team could build and deliver a game. It also showed their commitment to the shareware model. This was back in the day when the first few hours of a game were provided for free, and distribution to your mates was encouraged.

Because of shareware, Wolfenstein 3D ended up selling 100,000 units or more, in an age where cracking 10,000 was a good result. The game was immune from being pushed off store shelves for new inventory - something that is of course totally alien to us now (replaced with the phenomenon of being "lost in the fog" on Steam).

Most of the mythology of id centres around John Carmack's ahead-of-the-curve programming, but Romero and Hall's design deserves equal focus. Yes, Carmack's combination of assembly language and C (instead of running everything in a higher-level language) meant the game could run extraordinarily fast on even the 286s of the day.

But the decision to make Wolfenstein 3D a fast game shouldn't be understated. What could have been just a novelty Nazi-shooter, with herky-jerky movement and no real connection between the player and the gun, instead ran so slickly and had such a strong sense of kinetics, that Wolf 3D stayed relevant throughout the Age of Doom. There were gamers who continued to prefer it, especially its various sequels and addons such as Spear of Destiny, which gave us our first ever taste of Hitler in a power-suit.

The Wolfenstein 3D engine was also licensed out to other games. Sci-fi shooter Corridor 7 came out after Doom and flopped, despite its numerous upgrades over Wolf 3D. ShadowCaster showed that RPGs could be fast-paced, and probably set the groundwork for Doom- and Quake-based Heretic, Hexen and Hexen 2.

But it was Blake Stone that probably suffered most from id's release of Doom. It came out just a week before Carmack's 2.5D magnum opus, and its numerous enhancements - including better weapon effects, floor and ceiling textures, and secret levels - weren't enough. It had a few days in the sun... then disappeared as Doom dominated.

Probably the greatest Wolf 3D engine game was Rise of the Triad. Its concept was simple: what if you thought Wolfenstein 3D wasn't violent enough? The extreme speed and violence of ROTT kept it a relevant alternative to Doom, and it pioneered such modern mundanities as panoramic skies, fog, bullet holes, breakable glass and faked-up stairs.

Wolfenstein 3D had a huge and lasting effect on PC games. Before Wolf, games that took full advantage of PC's exponentially-growing power were disproportionately intellectual, complex, and difficult.

Wolfenstein 3D was good dumb fun. Have we looked back since? Absolutely. And to the sides, and up and down. All thanks to id, and the 1990's total lack of respect for the sacrifices of World War II. PC

NOT ACTUALLY A PC GAME

id Software - okay, John Carmack really - espoused platform agnosticism long before other major developers. Key parts of Doom, for instance, were built not on PC but on nothing less than a NeXTcube. This was the computer Steve Jobs built after he was ousted from Apple. Its operating system, NeXTStep, eventually became the foundation for MacOS. Everyone got their own versions of id's games, eventually. Though as id got richer and busier (and more factional) during the protracted development of Quake, most ports were farmed out to other developers with... varying levels of success.

Secret Lovers

DANIEL WILKS betrays one great love for a dalliance with another

For the last few years I've had one mainstay game that's consumed most of my non-work gaming time. That game is Path of Exile, the NZ created, free-to-play action RPG by Grinding Gear Games. I've taken a step away from PoE for a couple of months. By the time you read this an expansion that takes the game from being four acts to ten acts will have dropped and I'll doubtlessly be fighting my way through Wraeclast again, but in the run up to the release I took a break. Not from gaming, just from PoE, and that break came in the form of jumping head first into the strange world of GR pushing in Diablo III.

For those of you not familiar with Diablo III, the end game is made up of Rift running. Rifts are multi-level, timed dungeons that challenge players to kill enough enemies to summon a Rift Guardian (the big boss) before the timer runs out. Greater Rifts come in levels, from one, the easiest level, through to, theoretically, infinity. Last season the highest level anyone reached was GR 113. In the down time between seasons, some Necromancer builds have been able to complete a GR 115. So far the highest I have been able to complete is some Greater Rifts in the low 60s, and while I'll never be able to compete at the top tier, I think it has given me a pretty good glimpse at the fundamental workings of Diablo III and the seasonal end game approach.

Although they ostensibly fill the same market space, Path of Exile and Diablo III display almost diametrically opposed approaches to ARPG design, from character creation through to end game, but both of which are equally well designed and implemented. Diablo III is very much a modern Blizzard game, paring down the mechanics to a very solid core, making the title easily accessible but with enough depth to reward play. The major problem with the approach and Diablo III as a whole, is that the limited scope of skills available to each class and the reliance of armour sets for powerful buffs means that the game really revolves around cookie cutter builds for any meaningful success in end game. There is some scope for creativity in tweaking these endgame builds, but these tweaks are minor for the most part, and if they are successful usually get integrated into the base cookie cutter spec.

Path of Exile takes the opposite approach with their massive passive tree and use of skill and support gems to create abilities. While gear does come into play when it comes to skills – a six-link skill will be more powerful than a five-link and there are a few items that are required for specific builds (like Low Life) – but for the most part builds rely more on theorycrafting and understanding mechanics more than having specific gear sets. The downside to this is that it's all too easy to create builds that start strong but can't cut it in end game, or create builds that are too reliant on the whims of RNGesus.

> Path of Exile and Diablo III display almost diametrically opposed approaches to ARPG design

Both games adopt a seasonal approach to content, but the way they work again is almost diametrically opposed. Diablo III seasons are competitions for the most part, challenging players to complete a number of tasks to first unlock item sets to get started on pushing higher level Greater Rifts in the end game, and then to push the highest level rifts possible. PoE seasons introduce a new gameplay mechanic that runs throughout the entire experience as well as new items and occasionally skill gems, making both the levelling process and end game feel new. On top of that there are frequent races and events for cosmetic prizes.

In theory I'm much more partial to the PoE approach, but if the experience of the last couple of weeks is indicative of anything, it's that the highly structured nature of the Diablo III end game and seasonal approach is immensely compelling and immediately rewarding, especially if you're something of a completionist like me. Completing challenges for rewards of gear sets gives an immediate sense of progress. Chapters 2-4 of the seasonal journey each reward you with two pieces of a class specific gear set, allowing anyone to see the massive leap of power that comes with set gear bonuses, launching them directly into the end game instead of leaving them to grind for better items to make that first real step to the end. The structure gives immediate satisfaction and a constant feel of progress, and even as the challenges get harder you can still see a path to completion rather than feeling as though it's impossible.

By the time you're reading this I'll be back with PoE, revelling in the chaos and trying to create interesting builds that use interesting interactions of skill gems and passives. Not every build will be able to achieve end-game goals, but the builds will be mine and I'll find my satisfaction there. Still, brief sojourns into a world of relative simplicity and order are going to become a stable part of my gaming life I think. PC

▼ **Trust Wilks to take a break from a fantasy action RPG by playing another fantasy action RPG.**

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG
PC PowerPlay

ISSUE 266 ON SALE
SEPTEMBER 14

AORUS

X5 UNLEASH THE POWER

GEFORCE® GTX 1070 EXTREME GAMING LAPTOP

- 7th Generation Intel® Core™ i7-7820HK
- NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX 1070/1080
- QHD 2560x1440 120Hz WVA Display with NVIDIA® G-SYNC™ (optional)
- Support 3 Storage System 1 x 2.5" HDD/2.5" SSD 2 x M.2 SSD slots
- Thunderbolt™ 3 USB 3.1
- 16.8 Million Colors RGB Fusion Keyboard
- 32-Bit ESS SABRE Hi-Fi Audio DAC
- UHD Display With 100% Adobe RGB (optional)
- X-Rite™ Pantone® Calibration

PLACE TO PURCHASE

Affordable Laptops	affordablelaptops.com.au	i-store Computers	www.i-store.com.au	Mwave	www.mwave.com.au	PCD International	www.pcdi.com.au
Austin Computers	www.austin.net.au	JW Computers	www.jw.com.au	MSY Technology	www.msy.com.au	PLE Computers Online	www.ple.com.au
CPL	cplonline.com.au	Kong Computers	www.kongcomputers.com	Online Computer	www.onlinecomputer.com.au	Scorptec Computers	www.scorptec.com.au

MADE in TAIWAN

The entire materials provided herein are for reference only. AORUS reserves the right to modify or revise the content at anytime without prior notice.

www.aorus.com

CORSAIR

CORSAIR K68

Ultra Durable Mechanical Keyboard

Equipped with 100% CHERRY MX keyswitches and dynamic backlighting; the CORSAIR K68 is both dust and spill resistant.

MX CHERRY MECHANICAL SWITCH

AVAIABLE AT JB HI-FI

LEARN MORE AT **WWW.JBHIFI.COM.AU**